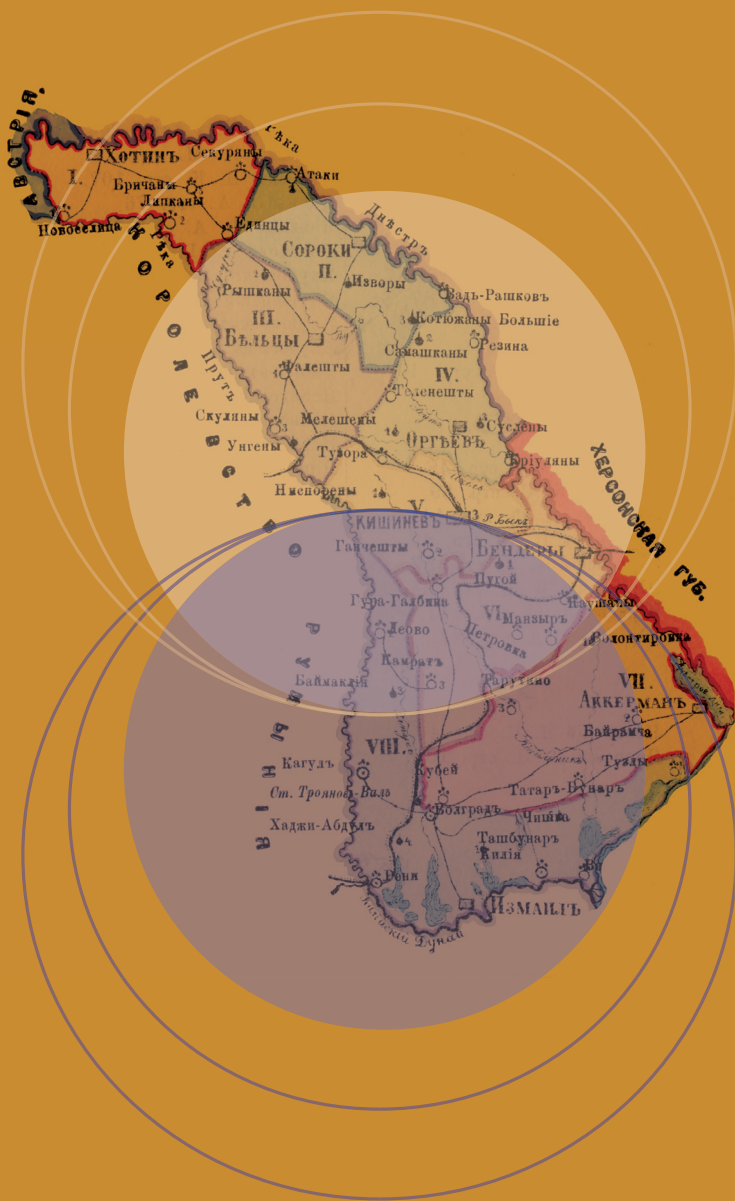


A CONTESTED BORDERLAND

Competing Russian
and Romanian
Visions of Bessarabia
in the Late Nineteenth
and Early Twentieth
Century



Andrei Cusco

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A Contested Borderland

HISTORICAL STUDIES
in Eastern Europe and Eurasia
VOLUME IV

SERIES EDITORS
*Alexei Miller, Alfred Rieber,
Marsha Siefert*



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Eastern Europe and **Eurasia**

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Romanian Visions of Bessarabia in the Late
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Andrei Cusco



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*To my parents,
Maria and Gheorghe*

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Introduction

During the last century, Bessarabia became connected to Russia through so many unbreakable bonds that it now has the right to consider itself [Russia's] own daughter [*rodnoi dshcher'iu*]; for the last hundred years, it [Bessarabia] has walked hand in hand with its mighty Mother, has shared her grief and joys, and itself enjoys [Russia's] sincere and unwavering love.

N. Lashkov, ed., *On the Occasion of the One-Hundredth Anniversary of Bessarabia's Accession to Russia*, Kishinev, 1912

Romanian monuments, Romanian memories, Romanian fields, Romanian rights are to be found at every step. The cohabiting nations: Ruthenians from the Hotin region; Russians who arrived from beyond the Dniester; Bulgarians who fled from beyond the Danube for fear of the punishing Turks; Old Believers exiled as far as possible from the official Orthodoxy; Germans seeking privileges and quick enrichment—all of them possess . . . only the antiquity of a hundred years that have elapsed since the 1812 treaty and the significance, historical rights, and moral sense that can derive from the presence of at most three generations on the same land.

Nicolae Iorga (Romanian historian), 1912

Bessarabia—A Contested Borderland of the Russian Empire

The territory that later acquired the designation “Bessarabia” was historically an ephemeral entity on the map of Europe. Strictly speaking, it only existed as an identifiable region between 1812 and 1940. As a product of imperial rivalry and the vagaries of international politics, it succumbed to the “fluid history” of the Russian-Romanian borderlands after World War II. Even the name “Bessarabia” was in fact suppressed in official parlance after 1945. However, the legacy of Russian empire-building on the Lower Danube cast a long shadow that in many ways still looms over the small strip of land between the Dniester and Prut rivers. Currently divided between the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, before 1812 most of this region was a part of the Moldavian Principality, which had become a semi-autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire in the mid-sixteenth century. Until the early nineteenth century, the southern part of the region adjoining the Black Sea was inhabited by Nogai Tatars, who enjoyed a privileged,

quasi-autonomous status within the Ottoman Empire. A string of fortresses in the south (Bender, Ismail, Akkerman, and Kilia) and the north (Hotin) had been constructed to “flank” the Moldavian Principality on the Danube and the Dniester and were reinforced by the Ottomans after they captured them in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. These fortresses and the surrounding areas were under direct Ottoman military jurisdiction (as *rayas/reayyas*) and were legally separated from the rest of the Principality. Thus, this territory was not a coherent administrative unit before the early nineteenth century. As a result of the Peace of Bucharest (concluded on May 16/28, 1812), which ended the 1806–12 Russian-Ottoman War, the territory situated between the Dniester, Prut, Danube, and the Black Sea was annexed by the Russian Empire. Although the term “Bessarabia” initially referred only to the southern portion of this region, it quickly came to designate the whole region once the Russian authorities adopted it for lack of a better alternative.¹ From a territorial and symbolic point of view, Bessarabia was a product of the Russian imperial project, which strove to bring its specific vision of order and rationality to the newly acquired space, while attempting to describe and appropriate it. Russian imperial discourse emphasized the complete rupture between the pre-1812 period (viewed in terms of a *tabula rasa* or a vaguely defined “Ottoman despotism”) and the new order, based on the image of the empire’s “civilizing mission,” the triumph of Orthodox spirituality, and material progress. Still, Bessarabia was never completely integrated into the Russian imperial imagination, preserving its borderland character throughout the nineteenth century.

The liminal character of the region was obvious immediately after its appearance on the map in 1812. The territory newly acquired by the Rus-

¹ Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this name became the subject of a real “terminological war” between Russian and Romanian politicians and publicists. The origins and significance of this designation were subject to differing interpretations, according to the actors’ respective political agendas. In Romanian sources, it was mostly associated with the Wallachian “Basarab” dynasty that controlled the southern fortresses on the Danube for a part of the fourteenth and early fifteenth century. Thus, this interpretation emphasized the Romanian “historical rights” over the region. The Russian sources preferred an etymology linked to the ancient tribes of the Bessi or Bastarnae, thus stripping the name of any Romanian connections. Despite the fact that it was first used by the Russian imperial regime to denote the whole region, it entered Romanian literary and vernacular vocabulary in the second half of the nineteenth century and is still widely applied to designate the current territory and population of the Republic of Moldova. In the early twentieth century, certain imperial bureaucrats and local activists even viewed this term as a basis for the creation and consolidation of a particular regional identity. This is similar to developments in other regions created by imperial states *ex nihilo* (e.g., Galicia).

sian Empire had a particular status among the latter's peripheries. Bessarabia's history during the nineteenth and early twentieth century can be studied from three distinct but complementary points of view. First, Bessarabia represented a revealing example of a borderland; that is, a territory situated in an intermediary position with regard to several centers of political power or cultural hegemony vying for control over, or at least laying a symbolic claim to, the region. Prior to its incorporation into the Russian Empire, Bessarabia was part of the "complex frontier region" of the Pontic Steppe,² characterized by unstable relations between nomadic and sedentary communities and, starting from the second half of the eighteenth century, by Russian-Ottoman inter-imperial rivalry. As the last territorial acquisition during Russia's expansion toward the southwest, the region represented a "transitional" space between the empire's western peripheries and the heavily colonized expanses of New Russia, thereby combining the essential features of both.

This transitional character of the Bessarabian province was obvious at the symbolic, administrative, and even legislative level. First, on a practical level, this was apparent in the demographic, economic, and cultural differences between the northern and central parts of the province (mostly inhabited by a relatively homogeneous and rural, Romanian-speaking population) and the southern districts, an area of intensive colonization akin to the neighboring region of New Russia. This spatial dualism was also discernible in the policies of the central authorities. Second, the nineteenth century witnessed fundamental changes in the ways in which Russian authorities described and perceived this region, stemming from two alternative concepts of imperial space. The first model emphasized the importance of the direct gaze of imperial agents, epitomized through the frequent travels of concerned Russian dignitaries to the region. This perspective was later replaced by a second model focusing on the rational, abstract, and impersonal gaze of modern bureaucracy that strove for uniformity and administrative transparency. Third, the peculiarity of the Bessarabian case during the second half of the nineteenth century derives from the contested character of this borderland, which became an object of rivalry and symbolic competition between the Russian Empire and the emerging Romanian nation-state. In fact, Bessarabia was the *only* Russian territory representing an object of contention between the empire and a fully crystallized nation-state. Bessarabia was claimed not only by two opposing projects of symbolic inclusion, but also by two alternative (and theoretically antagonis-

² The notion of a "complex frontier region" was introduced and developed by Alfred Rieber in several works, most notably in Alfred J. Rieber, "The Comparative Ecology of Complex Frontiers," in *Imperial Rule*, ed. Alexei Miller and Alfred J. Rieber (Budapest–New York: CEU Press, 2004), 178–210.

tic) models of political legitimacy. Both competing centers viewed this region as a passive object to be integrated into imperial or national space. This scheme minimized the role of the local population in the negotiation of collective identities or in formulating coherent projects of political and social action. This partly explains the weak political mobilization of the local elites and the very low degree of “nationalization” among the masses even as late as the early twentieth century. The multiethnic composition and contested geopolitical status of this region, among other structural factors, account for the specificity of Bessarabia’s transformation during the nineteenth century from an unsettled frontier into a periphery increasingly integrated into Russian imperial space.

Thus, in the second half of the nineteenth century Bessarabia became an object of *symbolic competition and contestation* between the Russian Empire and the Romanian nation-state. Generally, this is either taken for granted (within the logic of Romanian national discourse, which viewed the region as an integral part of the national body since time immemorial) or ignored (as in the case of the officially sanctioned Soviet narrative of the “friendship of the peoples”). Moreover, the systematic study of the “Bessarabian question” has been undertaken mostly from the vantage point of diplomatic and political history that perceived this issue as a minor instance of interstate rivalry or, at best, as an insignificant component of the larger “Eastern Question.” The Western perspective on the Russian-Romanian conflict over Bessarabia crystallized in the interwar period and was initially framed in legal-political terms, evolving into an issue of international law. The Soviet-Romanian pre-1940 controversy witnessed more complex argumentative strategies that were devised in order to claim a stronger basis of legitimacy for each of the two concerned parties. One of these strategies, repeatedly employed by Soviet negotiators, held that the “Bessarabian question” was a rather recent phenomenon that only emerged during the last phases of World War I and the Russian Revolution, when it was artificially inflated by members of the region’s Romanian-speaking intelligentsia who purportedly betrayed the true interests of the Bessarabian masses. The Romanians generally countered the heavily ideological Soviet stance by invoking the rhetoric of historical rights and by constructing a continuous tradition of resistance and national consciousness that survived under the difficult conditions of Russian imperial rule. Though this scheme was highly simplistic and essentialist (and, as such, served as a blueprint for the mobilizing narratives destined for internal consumption), its structural presuppositions proved to be highly resilient. Indeed, in more sophisticated forms they still provide the lexicon and the reference for the two competing visions of the past struggling for preeminence in the present Republic of Moldova.

Refusing to take both the national(ist) Romanian and the Russian/Soviet perspectives on the dynamics of the “Bessarabian question” at

face value, this book argues that the symbolic competition over Bessarabia gradually crystallized in the aftermath of the Crimean War. This competition was determined by Bessarabia's position as a borderland and by the region's marginality within the two conflicting projects of empire- and nation-building. Rather than displaying a systematic and continuous discursive pattern, this competition of mutually subversive (but also complementary) images of the area crystallized at particular moments of high symbolic tension (e.g., the 1878 Russian-Ottoman War, the 1905 Revolution, and the 1912 anniversary of Bessarabia's annexation to the empire). The pre-World War I context was a formative period for the vocabulary and the substance of the two antagonistic stances on Bessarabia that fully developed during the interwar years. In this sense, the present study can be interpreted as an intellectual prehistory of the Bessarabian problem, focusing on the gradual accumulation of the potential forces of the national and imperial visions of this contested periphery. However, this does not diminish the peculiarity of processes underway during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that should be reassessed in their own right.

The most relevant and characteristic feature of the Bessarabian case that sets it apart from the other borderland regions of the Russian Empire was the direct clash of national and imperial narratives over the same territory. Another feature distinguishing the local situation was the lack of articulation by the Bessarabian educated strata, which were targeted by integrative projects elaborated by the respective cultural and political centers of power.³ In the absence of an independent public sphere at the provincial level, images of Bessarabia were constructed outside the region itself, thus depriving its inhabitants of agency. This did not mean that the territory's population was entirely passive, but it did presuppose that the local fledgling intelligentsia played a marginal or subordinate role and was either incapable or unwilling to contribute to the process of Bessarabia's "symbolic inclusion" into the ideal spaces of the Russian and Romanian state-building projects. Thus, in addition to the predictable reluctance of the peasant masses to respond to modern incentives for collective mobilization, the Bessarabian intellectuals' passivity also calls for explanation. In order to do so, one must consider the policies of the Russian imperial government and the long-term weakness of local institutions before World War I.

This book aims to transcend both the nationalizing framework through which the history of the region is viewed in Romanian historiography and the exclusively center-oriented and statist approach dominant in the Russian case (in its Soviet as well as its current Russian guise). The approach

³ For the notion of "articulation" and its applicability, see Ronald Grigor Suny and Michael D. Kennedy, eds., *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).

used in this study emphasizes the construction of the region in Russian and Romanian narratives and the role of symbolic geography in furthering the agendas of the competing state-building projects. It also takes into account the complex interaction between local initiatives and central signals and the ensuing dualistic nature of the central gaze, which resulted in specific strategies of identity construction and mutual “othering.” The aforementioned lack of articulation by the local inhabitants did not signify complete passivity. The images produced by the Russian and Romanian centers were frequently adapted, appropriated, and reformulated at the local level. The cognitive discrepancy between the Bessarabian object and the Russian and Romanian intellectual and political subjects viewing it requires a comparative analysis. Any one-sided reading of the views on the region risks obscuring the fundamental mutual dependency of these conflicting images of Bessarabia.

Conceptual Framework and Historiographical Overview

Empires, Borderlands, and the Limits of Comparison

The notion of “empire” in current scholarly debates oscillates between the extremes of being all-inclusive and virtually devoid of meaning, succumbing under the weight of binary oppositions that seem to make any attempt at a working definition futile.⁴ Without offering a generic explanation of what an empire is, this book discusses the Bessarabian case from the perspective of the comparative history of Eurasian empires. Comparison is therefore pursued within the framework of the three Eurasian continental entities (the Russian, Habsburg, and Ottoman empires). Imperial ideological constructions, including the imagination and symbolic appropriation of imperial spaces, were a fundamental component of empire-building in all three cases. Moreover, the three polities frequently interacted as integrated parts of a peculiar “macro-system,” defining their policies on the peripheries vis-à-vis the borderland-managing strategies of their imperial rivals.⁵

The scholarly tradition of approaching the problem of comparative studies of empires can be divided into three broad subfields. The first ap-

⁴ I. Gerasimov, S. Glebov, A. Kaplunovski, et al., “In Search of a New Imperial History,” *Ab Imperio* 1 (2005): 33.

⁵ An argument developed, among others, by Alexei Miller in “The Value and the Limits of a Comparative Approach to the History of Contiguous Empires on the European Periphery,” in *Imperiology: From Empirical Knowledge to Discussing the Russian Empire*, ed. Kimitaka Matsuzato (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, 2007), 19–32.

proach might be conventionally labeled as sociological—an orientation that seeks to identify objective criteria for discerning an essence of “empire-ness” that is almost coterminous with human history. This tendency includes works that are highly different in style and content, but which aspire to uphold scientific rigor or all-encompassing images of the evolution of the “phenomenon of empire” throughout history.⁶ As one author recently emphasized, “there are few comprehensive studies of ‘empire’ as a distinct category of social science, and even fewer explicit theories, that is, explanatory accounts, of this phenomenon as a whole.”⁷ While S. N. Eisenstadt’s classic interpretation “relies . . . on a purely political definition of empires as centralized, bureaucratic forms of rule which should be contrasted to modern states,”⁸ Michael Doyle proposes one of the most compelling analyses of the imperial phenomenon from the perspective of political science, defining empire as a “system of interaction between two political entities, one of which, the dominant metropole, exerts political control over the internal and external policy—the effective sovereignty—of the other, the subordinate periphery.”⁹ Doyle’s view can thus be labeled “relational,”¹⁰ in contrast to the functional interpretation suggested by Eisenstadt. These authors share a “deductive” method of explanation and focus on “identifying the features of empires through a systematic comparison of imperial experiences.”¹¹

A second tendency is concrete-historical and focuses on more limited comparisons between contemporaneous and spatially contiguous early modern and modern imperial polities in Eurasia. This approach is probably best illustrated by the insightful work of Dominic Lieven on the Russian Empire and its “rivals.”¹² The author adds an important geopolitical and

⁶ S. N. Eisenstadt, *The Political Systems of Empires*, 2nd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1992); Michael Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986); and Maurice Duverger, ed., *Le Concept d'Empire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980).

⁷ Alejandro Colas, *Empire* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 10.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Doyle, *Empires*, 12.

¹⁰ On p. 45, Doyle reiterates that “empire . . . is a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society . . . Imperialism is simply the process or policy of establishing or maintaining an empire.” Making a further “methodological” point, Doyle asserts that “to explain the existence of empire . . . one must first demonstrate the existence of control; second, explain why one party expands and establishes such control; and third, explain why the other party submits or fails to resist effectively.” See Doyle, *Empires*, 45–46.

¹¹ Colas, *Empire*, 11.

¹² Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals* (London: John Murray, 2000).

strategic dimension to his argument and places the notion of power at the center of his interpretation while ignoring (in his definition of “empire,” though not in his account) the criterion of center-periphery relations as a defining characteristic of imperial control. A fundamental addition to the conceptual debate concerns the role of subjective factors in empire-building. Drawing on Rogers Brubaker’s “constructivist” and “subjectivist” readings of nationhood, Terry Martin emphasizes the interplay of objective and subjective factors in any imperial project, assigning primacy to the subjective perception of empire as the fundamental indicator of its existence.¹³ Martin, however, is not ready to reject the “objectivist” stance entirely, protesting against any “resigned retreat into postmodernism and discourse analysis” and calling for “a rigorous empirical and comparative study of those ‘objective’ factors that, in a given world-historical environment, govern the subjective perceptions of empire, nation and other potent categories of practice.”¹⁴ This position is close to my own understanding of empire. Therefore, Martin’s interpretation serves as a theoretical basis for the present study.

A third, recently emerging tendency in imperial studies is directly connected to the upsurge in “new imperial”¹⁵ and “new spatial histories.” This approach aims at “de-centering” imperial space as a category of analysis and redefining it as a “surface, or space, of relationships, the basic structure of which is a *nested* opposition between center and periphery.”¹⁶ In this scheme, borderlands become privileged sites for the emergence and display of the “imperial situation,” a concept gaining prominence in studies of the Russian Empire and challenging the previously assumed opposition between national and imperial politics and discourses. Empires thus become spaces of “hierarchically interconnected places”¹⁷ that are based on governing, fostering, and constantly reproducing difference, the concrete forms of

¹³ Terry Martin, “The Soviet Union as Empire: Salvaging a Dubious Analytical Category,” *Ab Imperio* 2 (2002): 91–105, here 95.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁵ For a forceful and compelling argument on the need for a “new imperial history,” drawing heavily on post-structuralism and discourse analysis, see Gerasimov et al., “In Search of a New Imperial History,” 33–56.

¹⁶ Sanna Tuoma and Maxim Waldstein, eds., *Empire De/Centered: New Spatial Histories of Russia and the Soviet Union* (London: Ashgate, 2013), 18. For other seminal works placing “spatiality” at the center of the field of Russian studies, see Mark Bassin, Christopher Ely, and Melissa K. Stockdale, eds., *Space, Place, and Power in Modern Russia: Essays in the New Spatial History* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010); and Nick Baron, “New Spatial Histories of Twentieth-Century Russia and the Soviet Union: Surveying the Landscape,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 55, no. 3 (2007): 374–401.

¹⁷ Tuoma and Waldstein, *Empire De/Centered*, 17.

the latter being shaped by changing regimes of territoriality and accompanying shifts in the imperial imagination.¹⁸ The modernizing Eurasian empires and the Russian Empire in particular, are especially interesting examples of acutely space-conscious polities that subjectively constructed hierarchies of belonging and symbolic inclusion while more or less successfully countering the challenge of nationalism both at the imperial center and on the peripheries.¹⁹ The construction of space at the material and symbolic levels will be a major subject of this book. Its specific contribution to current debates in the field stems from the parallel analysis of the Russian imperial and Romanian national projects of spatial construction, which point to the wider entanglements and oppositions between rival models of empire- and nation-building.

The interpretive framework proposed here follows an emerging trend situated at the intersection of history, political science, anthropology, and geography that views the interaction of “complex frontiers” as a scholarly topic in its own right. One of the basic problems confronting a functional definition of “borders” or “frontiers” when used in a historical context is the possibility of a historical reading of the “frontier experience.” Historians, on the one hand, have been preoccupied with problems of “border cultures” and “border societies” for much longer than their peers in the

¹⁸ It would be impossible to list here the vast literature on symbolic geographies and the construction of space in the Russian Empire and Eastern Europe. Some of the most conceptually sophisticated and stimulating works dealing with the Russian Empire include the following: Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Jane Burbank, Mark von Hagen, and Anatolyi Remnev, eds., *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700–1930* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); Ilya Gerasimov, Jan Kusber, and Alexander Semyonov, eds., *Empire Speaks Out: Languages of Rationalization and Self-Description in the Russian Empire* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009); and Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan, and Peter C. Perdue, eds., *Imperial Formations* (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007).

¹⁹ A very incomplete list of works on this topic would include the following examples: Alexei Miller, *The Romanov Empire and Nationalism: Essays in the Methodology of Historical Research* (Budapest–New York: CEU Press, 2008); Andreas Renner, *Russischer Nationalismus und Öffentlichkeit im Zarenreich, 1855–1875* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2000); Dietrich Geyer, *Russian Imperialism: The Interaction of Domestic and Foreign Policy, 1860–1914* (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1987); Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1992); Geoffrey A. Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552–1917* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1997); Vera Tolz, *Russia* (London: Arnold, 2001); and, of course, the already classic synthesis, Andreas Kappeler, *Russia: A Multiethnic History*, trans. Alfred Clayton (Harlow, Eng.: Pearson Education, 2001).

social sciences; indeed, “it has only been in the past half-century that anthropology, sociology and cultural studies have contributed to the widening debate over frontiers.”²⁰ On the other hand, one can observe at least three weak points in historical approaches to these complex issues. First, historians have tended to under-theorize the field due to the lack of adequate terminology to distinguish between the related but discrete notions of “borders,” “boundaries,” and “frontiers.” Second, the preferred unit of analysis has been either the state as an abstract category of political organization or the nation-state as the privileged form of a modern polity that purportedly provided an appropriate framework for analyzing the phenomenon of liminality. Third, excessive concentration on issues of territorial sovereignty and jurisdiction has obscured the much more complex and multilayered nature of border interactions.

The term “borderland” may overcome some of these difficulties by merging the territorial, cultural, ecological, and symbolic aspects into an integrated image of a region when viewed in terms of its location in space. It can also constitute a framework for assessing the contested nature of the space in question. The present study’s focus on the notion of a “borderland” follows “a growing trend in historical studies to eschew the traditional view of borders as seen from the center in favor of a new view of borders from the perspective of a state’s periphery, from the borders themselves.”²¹ One possible approach that could illuminate and further refine the multifaceted, conflicting, and unstable nature of borderland phenomena has recently been proposed by Alfred J. Rieber. His explanatory framework, based on the notion of “complex frontiers,” is especially well suited to the purposes of the present case study. First, it succeeds in encompassing and accounting for both the broader agendas of the state structures dominating the Eurasian landmass in the late modern period and for the local population’s negotiation with the center, thus emphasizing the dynamic and contested character of the borderlands. Second, it depicts the borderlands of the Eurasian continental empires as relational categories that were constructed by imperial bureaucrats and intellectuals in order to achieve tangible goals of spatial management, and also as symbolic aims to legitimize the imperial polity. Third, with regard to the Bessarabian case, the “complex frontiers” framework provides an entirely new operational context of analysis.²²

²⁰ Alfred J. Rieber, “Changing Conceptions and Constructions of Frontiers: A Comparative Historical Approach,” *Ab Imperio* 1 (2003): 26.

²¹ Hastings Donnan and Thomas M. Wilson, *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1999), 50.

²² A sophisticated and wide-ranging discussion of Eurasia’s “complex frontier regions” and the impact of the borderlands on empire-building can be found in

The most important insights that emerge from this analytical scheme concern the different methods of imagining and appropriating the borderlands characteristic of empires as opposed to nation-states. Despite the many similarities, several basic criteria distinguish the imperial type of border construction from the national one. The issues of territorial jurisdiction and sovereignty, clearly fundamental in relations between nation-states, are often irrelevant when discussing the processes of empire formation and development. Both the intrinsic process of empire formation (overwhelmingly through military conquest) and the legitimization of imperial domination lead to the essentially unstable and volatile character of the borders thus established. One can only agree with Rieber's assertion that "if imperial boundaries have no intrinsic limitations and are solely established by force, then they are bound to be heavily and persistently contested. The universal claims of empires, whatever the practical constraints may be in carrying them out, cannot by their very nature be accepted as legitimate by either the people they conquer or their rivals for the contested space."²³

The "complex frontiers" framework also allows one to analyze the Bessarabian case within a peculiar spatial and geopolitical context. In this sense, the notion of "complex frontier regions" not only provides the opportunity for a functional definition of Bessarabia as a borderland, but also points to the phenomenon of inter-imperial (and imperial versus nation-state) competition for dominion over these spaces that in many cases influenced the political and intellectual processes underway in the borderlands during the twentieth century. The contested nature of these "complex regions" is a welcome substitute for the frequently invoked "fluidity of identities"—a model that purportedly characterizes the human collectivities inhabiting such territories. The management of borders is one of the imperial legacies with the heaviest impact on successor nation-states. In effect, the notion that "the successor states were never truly nation-states but merely reproduced on a smaller scale the multicultural character of the empires of which they had been a part"²⁴ deserves more credit than it is usually granted in mainstream historiography. This is especially important if one takes into account the similar challenges of multiethnicity that modern bureaucratic empires and their nemeses—the emerging nation-states—

Rieber, "The Comparative Ecology of Complex Frontiers," 178–210; and especially in Alfred J. Rieber, *The Struggle for the Eurasian Borderlands: From the Rise of Early Modern Empires to the End of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

²³ Rieber, "The Comparative Ecology of Complex Frontiers," 199.

²⁴ Alfred J. Rieber, "Struggle Over the Borderlands," in *The Legacy of History in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, ed. S. Frederick Starr (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), 65.

shared. Such an approach does not minimize in any way the differences inherent in the political and institutional structure or in the modes of self-representation and legitimization of “nation-” and “empire-states.” However, it emphasizes the marginality and contested character of border zones as an independent factor that persisted, even if with a functionally changed status, in the otherwise divergent contexts of multiethnic dynastic empires and homogenizing nation-states.

An Uneven Historiography of a Contested Periphery

The claim that the present monograph emerged in a historiographical vacuum is both unbalanced and exaggerated. However, this claim is also true in the sense that no comprehensive study of Bessarabia’s symbolic appropriation (either by Russian imperial or by Romanian national discourse) has been written to date. The approach proposed here is implicitly based on a large body of empirical research that was produced throughout the twentieth century. Most of these works, however, were either specialized investigations or displayed explicit ideological agendas that this study seeks to transcend. The case of Soviet (including Soviet Moldavian) historical scholarship is especially conspicuous in this regard.²⁵ In his informative analysis of the Communist historiography of the “Bessarabian question,” W. P. van Meurs claims that a peculiar feature of Communist historical writing was the persistence of two basic myths that structured the meta-presuppositions of the historians and imposed strict limits on the range of possible opinions. Similar to other national peripheries of the Soviet Union, the history of Bessarabia revolved around the myth of the lesser evil and the myth of the friendship of the peoples.²⁶ Since Soviet historiography was subordinated to the project of building a separate Moldavian nation, the Russian imperial period became doubly important for the ideological tasks of Soviet historians. On the one hand, it was presented as a formative pe-

²⁵ I will not touch upon the works published before 1918 in the Russian Empire since these were mostly of a general character and might be viewed rather as sources for the present project. Nevertheless, officially commissioned statistical works (e.g., those of A. Zashchuk or P. Batiushkov) or scholarly monographs (e.g., the books of L. Kasso or L. Berg) remain interesting as examples of an articulate and occasionally polemical imperial discourse.

²⁶ Wilhelmus P. van Meurs, *Chestiunea Basarabiei în istoriografia comunistă* [The Bessarabian question in Communist historiography] (Chişinău: ARC, 1996), 175. These two myths were not confined to the realm of historiography, but in fact reflected the broader dynamics of Soviet nationalities policy. Moreover, these generalizations are valid mostly for the post-1945 period when direct polemics against the Romanians ceased and the “Bessarabian controversy” assumed subtler forms.

riod for the “Moldavian bourgeois nation.” This implied a reserved, benevolent attitude toward the Russian imperial regime (as “objectively progressive”) and a mostly positive interpretation of the Russian imperial legacy in economic and cultural terms. On the other hand, the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were teleologically construed as a “pre-revolutionary stage,” which led to inordinate concentration on the revolutionary movement and left-wing ideologies, and also on agrarian and social history that quantitatively dominated scholarly output.

The situation is similar in the case of Romanian national historiography. The two historical traditions shared the logic of the symbolic competition analyzed here and thus cannot be considered as balanced analyses of the Bessarabian situation. In a sense, they perpetuated late nineteenth-century discourses while also transforming them. The bulk of the historical literature on Bessarabia published in Greater Romania was the oeuvre of national activists with a Bessarabian background who understandably pursued the aim of justifying the Romanian nation-building project in the region. This movement led to a highly polemical and emotionally charged stance on Russian imperial domination in the area, highlighting the themes of denationalization and Russification and emphasizing the pernicious impact of the tsarist administration on the national consciousness of the Bessarabian Romanians. The multiethnic character of Bessarabia was treated either as an unwelcome accident or as the result of the conscious design of the authorities to transform the ethnic structure in order to achieve their assimilatory goals.²⁷ Under the Romanian Communist regime, Bessarabia always lurked in the background as a potentially useful topos that was occasionally activated, but was never allowed to emerge as a contentious issue on the surface of official discourse.²⁸ After 1989, despite the full recovery of the

²⁷ Some of the more representative works in this category are: Petre Cazacu, *Moldova dintre Prut și Nistru, 1812–1918* [Moldavia between the Prut and the Dniester, 1812–1918] (Iași: “Viața Românească,” n.d.) (republished in Chișinău: “Știința,” 1992); Ștefan Ciobanu, *Cultura românească în Basarabia sub stăpânirea rusă* [Romanian culture in Bessarabia under Russian domination] (Chișinău: Editura Enciclopedică, 1992); and Ion Nistor, *Istoria Basarabiei* [The history of Bessarabia] (Chișinău: Cartea Moldovenească, 1991) (originally published in 1924). It is impossible to list the large number of brochures, anniversary publications on the occasion of the celebration of the 1918 unification, or polemical articles.

²⁸ A detailed analysis of the “truncated” Soviet-Romanian controversy over the “Bessarabian question” between 1964 and 1989 can be found in Wilhelmus P. van Meurs, *Chestiunea Basarabiei în istoriografia comunistă*, 269–94. The author concludes by interpreting the manipulation of the “Bessarabian question” in Romanian Communist historiography in terms of the interdependence between the “political functionality” and the peculiar dynamism shared by the historical profession and Communist ideology.

interwar discourse on Bessarabia, the region remained rather marginal in the general scheme of history writing in Romania.

Before 1990, Western discourse on Bessarabia was divided into two distinct tracks. On the one hand, it featured in the writings of Romanian émigrés who perpetuated the interwar tradition and viewed Bessarabia as a contested territory between Romania and the Soviet Union. This scholarly activity reached its apex in the 1980s when the bulk of émigré literature on the Bessarabian borderland and on the Soviet-Romanian territorial dispute was published.²⁹ On the other hand, several studies that placed the Bessarabian case within the broader context of Sovietology and area studies also emerged.³⁰ One of the few comprehensive treatments of the early period of Bessarabia's integration into the Russian imperial system is George F. Jewsbury's work, which should be placed in the context of the preoccupation with "Russian imperialism" that crystallized in the 1970s.³¹ After 1990, Western scholarship focused either on the post-1918 period or on contemporary developments in the Republic of Moldova. The imperial period figured in synthetic works devoted to the Soviet era or to the "failed" Soviet nation-building project in the Moldavian Autonomous So-

²⁹ The most representative works of this series include: George Cioranescu, *Bessarabia: Disputed Land between East and West* (Munich: Ion Dumitru Verlag, 1985); Nicholas Dima, *Bessarabia and Bukovina: The Soviet-Romanian Territorial Dispute* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1982); Nicholas Dima, *From Moldavia to Moldova: The Soviet-Romanian Territorial Dispute* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1991); Maria Manoliu-Manea, ed., *The Tragic Plight of a Border Area: Bessarabia and Bucovina* (Los Angeles: Humboldt State University Press, 1983); and Hannes Hofbauer and Viorel Roman, *Bukowina, Bessarabien, Moldawien: vergessenes Land zwischen Westeuropa, Russland und der Türkei* (Vienna: Promedia, 1993). A more ambiguous stance can also be found in the work of Michael Bruchis, *Rossiiia, Rumyniia i Bessarabiia (1812–1918–1924–1940)* [Russia, Romania, and Bessarabia] (Jerusalem: Graph Press, 1979). This author is more notorious for his works on Soviet nationality policy in Soviet Moldavia.

³⁰ Western preoccupation with the "Bessarabian question" appeared before 1945 in the context of the "diplomatic war" between Romania and the USSR (the high points of this conflict occurred at the Paris Peace Conference in 1918–19 and at the Vienna Conference in 1924). These works primarily targeted the general public in the West. However, certain texts exemplified sound scholarship: Charles Upson Clark, *Bessarabia: Russia and Roumania on the Black Sea* (New York: Dodd Mead, 1927); Antony Babel, *La Bessarabie. Etude historique, ethnographique et économique* (Paris: Felix Alcan, 1926); and C. Uhlig, *Die Bessarabische Frage. Eine geopolitische Betrachtung* (Breslau: Ferdinand Hirt, 1926). One could also mention the work of Andrei Popovici, *The Political Status of Bessarabia* (Washington, D.C.: Randell, 1931).

³¹ George F. Jewsbury, *The Russian Annexation of Bessarabia, 1774–1828: A Study of Imperial Expansion* (Boulder, CO: East European Quarterly, 1976).

viet Socialist Republic (MASSR) and the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR).³² One should note that a separate (and thriving) research field is devoted to the minority ethnic groups of nineteenth and early twentieth-century Bessarabia.³³

Post-1991 Moldovan historiography is still developing separately from the main trends of Western scholarship and is only slowly overcoming its “underlying ‘parochialism’” and “internaliz[ing] the theoretical and methodological achievements that marked the development of Western social sciences.”³⁴ The complex identity politics in post-independence Moldova has a direct impact on the professional milieu of historians who are embroiled in heated identity struggles among themselves and with the state. In these circumstances, the imperial period is itself a field of symbolic contestation. Most of the research undertaken after 1990 has focused on the national movement in Russian Bessarabia. Despite the questionable application of this notion to the region, such gains in empirical knowledge help one to better understand Russian-Romanian symbolic competition.³⁵ Certain elements of novel interpretive frameworks have become discernible in recent years. A major achievement in this regard was signaled by the 2002 publication of Iulian Frunțașu’s book *An Ethno-Political History of Bessarabia*.³⁶ This work, which adopts the stage-like model of Miroslav Hroch and

³² An eloquent example in this regard is provided by Charles King in his *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), in which he provides an informative and balanced account of Russian policy in the region and local political processes in the early twentieth century.

³³ See, for example, Mariana Hausleitner, “Die interethnischen Beziehungen der Deutschen in Bessarabien im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert,” *Südostdeutsches Archiv* 46/47 (2003–4): 79–111; and especially M. Hausleitner, *Deutsche und Juden in Bessarabien (1814–1941). Zur Minderheitenpolitik Russlands und Großrumäniens* (München: IKGS Verlag, 2005).

³⁴ Constantin Iordachi and Balázs Trencsényi, “In Search of a Usable Past: The Question of National Identity in Romanian Studies, 1990–2000,” *East European Politics and Societies* 17, no. 3 (2003): 415–16.

³⁵ Gheorghe Negru, *Țarismul și mișcarea națională a românilor din Basarabia* [The Tsarist regime and the national movement of the Romanians from Bessarabia] (Chișinău: Prut International, 2000); Ion Varta, “Unele aspecte privind mișcarea națională în Basarabia la începutul sec. al XX-lea” [Certain aspects concerning the national movement in Bessarabia in the early twentieth century], *Revista de istorie a Moldovei* 4 (1993): 14–27; and Ion Varta, “Unele deziderate ale mișcării naționale a românilor basarabeni la mijloc de an 1906” [Certain desiderata of the Bessarabian Romanians’ national movement in mid-1906], *Destin Românesc* 1 (1995): 48–60.

³⁶ Iulian Frunțașu, *O istorie etnopolitică a Basarabiei (1812–2002)* [An ethno-political history of Bessarabia, 1812–2002] (Chișinău: Cartier, 2002).

the insights of Ronald Grigor Suny on the interplay between national and social factors in the nationalist movements in the former Russian Empire, proposes a long-term reading of Bessarabia's history in terms of the interrelated processes of social modernization and nation-formation. Another recent example of the changing intellectual climate and the greater openness of local researchers to joint projects with their Western peers was the publication of a collective volume on Moldova's "weak state" and "uncertain citizenship" featuring Moldovan and Western scholars of the region.³⁷

Chronological and Thematic Structure of the Book

The chronological framework of this study ranges from the early 1860s to the entry of the Romanian Kingdom into World War I (August 1916) and the outbreak of the February Revolution in the Russian Empire in 1917. Selecting the 1860s as the starting point is conditioned by three main factors. First, the emergence of the Romanian national state in 1862 marked the consolidation of the alternative center of symbolic attraction and contest and shifted Russian bureaucrats' perception of the Bessarabian borderland to a new level. Second, the inauguration of Russia's Great Reforms and their implementation in Bessarabia signified a new phase in the empire's integrative designs on the area and also provided greater space for the articulation of multiple discourses within the imperial elite. Finally, the impact of the Polish Revolt of 1863–64 altered Russian policy in the Western Borderlands and impacted the empire's administrative practices, including in Bessarabia. The present study's upper chronological limit was arguably more arbitrary. Thus, the book does not examine the final phase of political mobilization in Bessarabia, which witnessed intense debates between the autonomist and nationalist factions of the local elite and exacerbated tensions between the nationalizing and socializing agendas in the region. The later phases of the war and the revolutionary upheaval in the Russian Empire completely changed the substance of the "Bessarabian problem" and should be the subject of a separate investigation. While there were significant continuities with the previous period, the collapse of the tsarist regime in Russia seems like an appropriate end point. A separate

³⁷ Monica Heintz, ed., *Stat slab, cetățenie incertă: Studii despre Republica Moldova* [Weak state, uncertain citizenship: studies on the Republic of Moldova] (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2007). Though mostly dealing with contemporary issues and featuring sociologists, anthropologists, ethnologists, and political scientists, this volume is a welcome example of interdisciplinary cooperation. It also contains a "historically centered" article by Cristina Petrescu on the "construction of national identity in Bessarabia" (see Heintz, 127–53).

discussion of the World War I period is justified by the intense nationalization of Russian imperial discourse and by the challenges to the traditional priorities of Romanian nation-building provoked by the 1914–16 neutrality polemics.

This book is divided into five chapters. The first chapter focuses, first, on the Russian imperial experience and the dilemmas of empire-building on the peripheries and, second, on the construction of the national narrative in modern Romania. The goal of this chapter is to provide the reader with the necessary background and contextual information in order to follow the dynamics of the two competing discourses with regard to Bessarabia. It ends with a brief section outlining the general background and context of Russian policies in Bessarabia between the 1860s and World War I. Chapter II examines the emergence of the “Bessarabian question” during the Russian-Ottoman War of 1877–78 and the Southern Bessarabian “anomaly” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, both on the level of discourse and practical imperial policy. This chapter first discusses the “diplomatic war” that followed the Russian-Ottoman conflict of 1877–78 and the open confrontation between the Russian and Romanian governments over the districts of Southern Bessarabia granted to Moldavia by the Paris Treaty of 1856. The second section of this chapter is devoted to the transfer of Romanian institutions to the post-1878 Ismail district and to imperial officials’ perception of this administrative aberration, seeking to uncover the reasons for the persistence of the Romanian governing model until the fall of the Romanov regime. It also analyzes the mutual visions of otherness and the perceptions of the Romanian vision of modernity by Russian imperial discourse, as well as their practical consequences. Chapter III analyzes the high point of Russian-Romanian symbolic competition on the occasion of the one-hundredth-anniversary celebration of Bessarabia’s annexation in 1912. The argument focuses on the various integrative and rhetorical strategies used by the central authorities, as well as local social actors’ negotiations. Before and during the anniversary, Russian and Romanian visions of Bessarabia acquired symbolic weight and consistency. The jubilee marked the hardening of imperial discourse while also emphasizing its uneasy cohabitation with nationalizing themes and its internal contradictions. The 1912 ceremonies performed in the Russian Empire also had consequences for the Romanian national narrative, including Bessarabia’s fixture on the map of the Romanian intellectual community and the increased presence of Bessarabian topics in political debates of the day. Chapter IV provides case studies of three Bessarabian-Romanian intellectuals and public figures who contributed in various ways to the articulation of Romanian nationalism and the development of a specific image of Bessarabia in this context. This section examines the works (and biographies) of Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu (1838–1907), Dimitrie C. Moruzi (1850–

1914), and Constantin Stere (1865–1936). The final chapter focuses on the period of the 1905 Revolution and World War I as a crucial turning point in the competition between the two narratives about Bessarabia. Beginning with the wider processes of mass mobilization and the politicization of ethnicity in wartime imperial Russia, the chapter seeks to compare and contrast the official Russian image of Bessarabia to contemporary public debates in Romania. It concludes by addressing the feeble attempts at articulating a local Bessarabian voice within the inter-imperial contest for preeminence in Eastern Europe in 1916. Two years later, the radical transformations taking place across Eurasia would lead to Bessarabia's complete (albeit temporary) integration into the Romanian nation-building project.

CHAPTER I

Empire- and Nation-Building in Russia and Romania: Discourses and Practices

The Russian Empire and the Challenge of Multiethnicity: Managing the Periphery

Orientalism and Colonization on the Imperial Periphery

What kind of empire was the Romanov polity? To what extent were the policies of the Russian state on its peripheries colonial? These questions are directly concerned with the nature of center-periphery relations within the empire and with Russia's complex position vis-à-vis the West. The possible insights that a student of the Eurasian continental empires might gain by directly applying postcolonial theory are limited. However, one can agree with Maria Todorova that the real controversy behind the debates on Orientalism's presence or salience in Russian thought is "the timeless question of Russian history: how unique is Russia? How applicable are general historical categories and models (especially when universalized on the basis of Western European experience) to the Russian case?"¹ Russia, which had a "triangular relationship" with the West and the "orient," clearly does not fit into the classic Saidian mold. In other words, Russia "was both the subject and the object of Orientalism."²

Due to Edward Said's focus on the Middle East as the primary object of Orientalism, the literal application of this term to other regions of Eurasia is disputable. Eastern Europe, no less than Russia itself, does not fit squarely within the domain of Orientalism, even if the techniques of "making the other" display some striking similarities with Said's model. Larry Wolff's discussion of Eastern Europe as a case of "semi-orientalization" is

¹ Maria Todorova, "Does Russian Orientalism Have a Russian Soul? A Contribution to the Debate between Nathaniel Knight and Adeeb Khalid," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 717.

² Alexander Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 251.

an eloquent example of the benefits and pitfalls of such a model.³ Wolff provides an interesting discussion of Russia as an object of the Enlightenment's gaze, but he sees no problem with including it as a secondary sub-category in Said's model (certainly, it was not the author's intention to explore the Russian Empire's ambiguity in this regard). Maria Todorova, on the contrary, is much more reluctant to accept Said's model wholeheartedly and attempts to offer a peculiar "regional" interpretation of the European construction of the "other." She deliberately constructs a model of the Balkans as an "antinomy" not only to Western Europe, but also to the Orient. Consequently, her definition of "Balkanism" is explicitly focused on disputing Said's model while simultaneously drawing inspiration from it. In Todorova's own words, "unlike Orientalism, which is a discourse about an imputed opposition, Balkanism is a discourse about an imputed ambiguity."⁴ Undoubtedly, the same thing could be said about Russia (or perhaps any other region included in the larger category of Eastern Europe), but the fundamental question remains: can one truly preserve the heuristic value of Said's model by invoking the peculiarity of various regional cases?

Maria Todorova elaborates on the contrasts between the Balkans and the Orient and defines Balkanism (in opposition to Orientalism) as what the former is not.⁵ However, it seems that she interprets Orientalism too literally as the enterprise of learned specialists with definite regional and disciplinary boundaries rather than as a discursive formation functioning in different contexts and articulated by different people, while preserving the fundamental points of reference and inbuilt assumptions. The problem with the "orientalization" of the self and the adjacent "other" is the common point of reference (the imagined West) that both the subject and the object of Orientalism share. The concept of "nesting Orientalisms" (proposed by Milica Bakić-Hayden) appears more useful, especially because it emphasizes the multiple and complex nature of Orientalist discourse without compartmentalizing it into discrete regional entities that have Orientalism both as their ultimate source and their "nemesis."⁶ As Adeeb Khalid notes in his contribution to the controversy over Russian

³ Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

⁴ Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 17.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 12–14.

⁶ Milica Bakić-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of the Former Yugoslavia," *Slavic Review* 54, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 917–31; and Milica Bakić-Hayden and Robert Hayden, "Orientalist Variations on the Theme 'Balkans': Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics," *Slavic Review* 51, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 1–15.

Orientalism, “although orientalization posits absolute civilizational distance, it can be deployed in highly complex ways.”⁷ Certainly, the tactics of “self-orientalization” also emulated Western European models and thus cannot be severed from this broader context. The identification of regional variations, while valuable, should not obscure the importance of the common pool of scholarly and literary traditions that served as the sources and the implicit background of many instances of “nesting Orientalisms.”

Recent scholarship on the Russian Empire finally witnessed an upsurge of interest in the peculiarity of Russian Orientalist traditions.⁸ One of the most challenging and controversial interpretations of the Russian experience has been offered by Alexander Etkind, who claims that the Russian Empire was both a colonial empire like its Western counterparts and a space colonized by its own government: “In the nineteenth century, Russia was a colonial empire alongside those of Britain or Austria, *and* a colonized territory like Congo or the West Indies.”⁹ However, what he identifies as Russia’s “internal colonization” may well have derived from the strategy of Russian state-building, which had much in common with the modernizing efforts of other European composite states in the modern period. Etkind rightly shows that the cultural metaphor of “internal colonization” was central to Russia’s self-perception, but he is far from convincing in linking this metaphor to the actual practice of Russian empire-building. The notion of the “politics of difference,” as proposed by Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper in their recent global history of empire, better encapsulates the varied strategies of continental empires to dominate and control their multiethnic peripheries, which often entailed “recognizing the multiplicity of peoples and

⁷ Adeeb Khalid, “Russian History and the Debate over Orientalism,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 698.

⁸ Three works have had a major impact on the field in recent years: Vera Tolz, *Russia’s Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); and Etkind, *Internal Colonization*. Among other works, one could cite: Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini, eds., *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700–1917* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Khalid, “Russian History and the Debate over Orientalism,” 691–99; Nathaniel Knight, “On Russian Orientalism: A Response to Adeeb Khalid,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 701–15; Todorova, “Does Russian Orientalism Have a Russian Soul?”, 717–27; and Nathaniel Knight, “Grigor’ev in Orenburg, 1851–1862: Russian Orientalism in the Service of Empire?”, *Slavic Review* 59, no. 1 (2000): 74–100.

⁹ Etkind, *Internal Colonization*, 251.

their varied customs as an ordinary fact of life.”¹⁰ The situation became much more complicated once nationalism entered the equation.

The early stages of Bessarabia’s image construction were heavily influenced by Orientalist discourse. The similar climate, Muslim/Ottoman legacy, and the constant invocation of the barbarity of the region’s inhabitants connected Bessarabia to the Pontic steppe (that in fact extended to the Budjak, the steppe-like region in southern Bessarabia adjoining the Black Sea). However, in the second half of the nineteenth century the region became “normalized” and did not figure as prominently as an exotic borderland of the empire. The imperial dimension of Russian state-building in Crimea, the Caucasus, and Central Asia was inextricably linked to complex issues related to the imperial elite’s self-identification and the role of the empire’s “core people.” Russia’s position vis-à-vis the East was never clear-cut and cannot be conceived in terms of a hierarchical relationship between a dominant core and a colonial periphery. Indeed, it was “impossible for Russia to entirely shake off the ‘Eastern’ aspect of its identity.”¹¹ This fundamental uneasiness and the insecure self-positioning of Russia’s educated strata derived not only from the vexing relationship between the tsarist empire and the West, but also from the fluidity of Russianness that did not always distinguish between the central and the peripheral regions of the empire. The East became as much a space for the crystallization and negotiation of Russianness as a foreign and unfriendly domain. Even in the most unambiguously colonial relationship to its various Orients, which was displayed in Central Asia, the Russian authorities had to find a balance between the Western-inspired models of colonial encounters and the complicated issue of advancing Slavic settlements that disrupted the region’s ecological patterns and created nearly insuperable dilemmas for imperial bureaucrats.¹² The contiguous space of the Romanov Empire and the ambiguous place of the Russian element within its ethno-social structure should prompt any researcher of Russian Orientalism to exercise extra caution when approaching the subject.

The Russian Empire’s colonization of steppe regions is directly relevant to the Bessarabian case. Contrary to the customary emphasis of imperial Russian and Soviet historiography on the supposedly natural and organic process of the expansion of Slavic settlements toward the south and east,

¹⁰ Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 12.

¹¹ Robert P. Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Imperial Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 2.

¹² For an analysis of Russian policy and discourse in Turkestan, see Daniel R. Brower, *Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire* (London: Routledge, 2003); and Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent, 1865–1923* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

the emerging consensus on Russian colonization and “population politics” in steppe regions contends that “Russian expansion . . . was anything but haphazard, spontaneous, and uncontrolled”; instead, it was “a deliberate process with varying motives and policies . . . but consistent in its objectives of expansion and colonization of the new regions and peoples.”¹³ Khodarkovsky employs the notion of “organic colonialism” to point to Russia’s specificity among other European polities that engaged in systematic expansion. Though certainly innovative with respect to the complex mechanism of political and cultural interaction between sedentary and nomadic societies, this approach is less convincing when arguing that the Russian Empire’s “attitudes, objectives, and strategies in the southern borderlands were fundamentally no different from those of the Western European empires in their overseas possessions.”¹⁴

This appears to be the case not because the Russian government refused to emulate Western models or borrow practices from its immediate imperial neighbors, but because the link between empire-building and colonization was fraught with profound ambiguities. These ambiguities included, among other things, a discrepancy between the discursive, symbolic appropriation of the steppe and practices on the ground; the refusal of imperial authorities to treat the steppe region as an outright colony and the preference for foreign colonists that persisted until the middle of the nineteenth century; the insecure status of new arrivals on the steppe who failed to create anything resembling the settler communities of the Western maritime empires; and finally, the common “colonial paternalism” displayed toward the Russian peasantry and the ostensibly “colonized” alien populations.¹⁵ Willard Sunderland is careful to link Russian “population politics” on the steppe with “a particularly complicated kind of imperialism, one in which empire building, state building, society building and nation building . . . invariably intertwined.”¹⁶

While the empire of the tsars was no exception to the general trend of European expansion at the expense of non-European communities, the dynamics of settlement and the legitimizing myths that Russian officials and settlers developed clearly set it apart from analogous imperial enterprises. Ultimately, the concept of “organic settlement” was not simply a (self-)deceiving strategy of dissimulation. It was also part and parcel of

¹³ Michael Khodarkovsky, *Russia’s Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500–1800* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 229.

¹⁵ For an illuminating discussion of these aspects, see Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

Russia's peculiar relationship to its imperial experience. Complex issues involving Russia's self-awareness, its claim to represent civilization in the East, the enduring threat of cultural hybridization, and the menace inherent in the possibility of colonizers "going native" were all present in the debates on the means and objectives of colonization raging until the middle of the nineteenth century. The major subsequent development was the redirecting of the colonizing drive toward Siberia and the Far East. The Eurasian steppe region ceased to be an effective area of colonization after the 1850s, but the discourses and practices developed there significantly influenced the later phases of agricultural settlement in more remote regions.

In this sense, Bessarabia initially was part of the Russian Empire's steppe frontier. The process of state-sponsored and spontaneous colonization tolerated and then actively promoted by the Russian imperial regime radically altered the demographic structure of the region in the first half of the nineteenth century. From the perspective of the imperial center, the policy of inviting foreign settlers to the sparsely populated southern area of the region had a pragmatic dimension: it aimed at the transformation of an uncultivated borderland into a productive and rationally structured space. The ensuing demographic disparity between the southern colonized regions and the north-central Romanian-dominated area was less the result of a systematic policy than the by-product of the imperial strategy to integrate an unstable and previously heavily fortified inter-imperial military frontier into the polity of the Romanovs.

In effect, before their annexation by Russia, both the southern stretch of Bessarabia and the lands to the east, then commonly known as New Russia, had been contested territories between the various conglomerates of steppe nomads and semi-sedentary warrior formations (mainly the Cossacks) and the emerging, consolidated states to their north and west (first the Moldavian Principality and Poland, to be later joined or replaced by the Ottoman and Russian empires). The lengthy and active entanglement of the "eastern marches" of the Moldavian Principality into steppe politics (represented here either in the guise of the Nogai Tatars or the Crimean Khanate) is often dismissed or viewed only in terms of military confrontations. In fact, the prolonged cohabitation of nomadic and sedentary populations entailed multiple strategies of accommodation and compromise while not excluding, of course, military conflict. The porous, shifting, and transitional character of this frontier territory was in the process of being changed by the intervention of the centralizing and modernizing Russian polity. In the Ottoman period, the string of fortifications along the Dniester and the Danube transformed the entire zone into a militarized area analogous to the Habsburg military frontier (though without any involvement of the local population or the "policing" ambitions of the Habsburg authori-

ties). However, the “pacification” brought about by Russian conquest created a new vision of the recently acquired land. The transitional nature of Bessarabia is revealed by the duality of the Russian discourse surrounding it. While the major part of the province was to be integrated into the empire as a liberated territory inhabited by a fellow Orthodox people, the former expanse of the Budjak was clearly a no-man’s-land that had to be reclaimed for civilization and progress. The closest parallel could be seen in Russian policies in the empire’s eastern borderlands, where the steppe grasslands played the role of an alien environment that had to be “tamed.” Situated at the “edge of the Eurasian steppe,” as Willard Sunderland writes,¹⁷ Bessarabia represented a major area of state-sponsored colonization as part of the empire’s social engineering projects. The Russian Empire never aimed at imitating the Western concept of *terra nullius* (and certainly displayed no ambition to devise comparable legal terminology). In practical terms, however, this region was the equivalent of a desert waiting to be populated and cultivated.

*The Differentiated Character of Russian Imperial Policy
in the Borderlands*

The historian Andreas Kappeler, among others, has linked the “pre-modern” nature of the Russian imperial polity before the Petrine period, and even beyond, to the specific policy of integrating local elites and preserving multiple conflicting hierarchies both at the central and local levels of government.¹⁸ Indeed, the Russian Empire appears to have been remarkably open to the co-optation of native leaders and privileged social groups, though the criteria for their voluntary assimilation into the Russian nobility or service class shifted from an emphasis on religious conversion to a tendency toward cultural and linguistic assimilation. At no point in its centuries-long existence, however, did the Russian state pursue a coherent and unified strategy of integrating the borderlands into the empire.

At the most general level, the various inhabitants of the Russian Empire were divided into two fundamental categories: the “natural-born” or “native” (*prirodnye*) groups, fulfilling certain obligations to the imperial state and gradually acquiring legal equality as subjects (and then citizens) of the empire; and the initially limited, but constantly expanding category of “aliens” (*inorodtsy*), who were deemed “uncivilized” and politically unreliable, but who enjoyed certain privileges (namely, exemption from military conscription and the preservation of their local or tribal power structures) while being

¹⁷ Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field*, 97.

¹⁸ Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History* (Harlow, Eng.: Pearson Education, 2001), 114–25.

placed explicitly outside the “estate-based” social structure of the empire.¹⁹ This distinction was initially a legal phenomenon and did not necessarily signify a radical difference in social status, especially given the existence of serfdom and the fact that the imperial state was dominated by a “service mentality” that emphasized the primacy of subjects’ obligations to the state as opposed to their legal rights. However, the notion of *inorodtsy* became increasingly central to the bureaucratic mind of the Russian authorities and to the imagination of Russian nationalists as it shifted and expanded its meaning throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The notion itself was profoundly ambiguous from the outset, despite its ostensibly legal definition. This was due to the blurred criteria of inclusion within this category. Religion, way of life, geographical location, and the potential threat to the empire’s unity periodically surfaced as the dominant elements within the otherwise shifting combination of factors. Though this term referred explicitly to the nomadic and “wandering” peoples of Siberia, as initially defined by Speranskii’s Siberian statute of 1822, the authorities added to the uncertainty by including such sedentary and literate groups as the Jews and settled Central Asian communities within the same category. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the notion of *inorodtsy* in fact served as a marker of cultural difference from the Russians and was gradually imbued with ethno-linguistic overtones. The widening discrepancy between the term’s narrow legal definition and its actual usage was particularly obvious from the 1860s onward, when the educational reforms of the government (epitomized by Il’minskii’s “system” in the Volga region) led to the application of this label to the area’s non-Russian “small peoples.”²⁰

The real watershed in the semantic evolution of this category, however, occurred in the early twentieth century when both the nationalizing drive of the imperial court and the emergence of right-wing political parties in the context of the 1905 Revolution led to an ethnically charged and implicitly derogatory definition of *inorodtsy*—as the totality of the unreliable and potentially threatening non-Russian subjects of the empire. The impact of the 1905 Revolution in this respect should not be neglected and has been emphasized by Charles Steinwedel, who posits a direct link between revolutionary turmoil and the complex evolution of ethnic categories in late imperial Russia.²¹ On the one hand, the transfer of the *inorodtsy* category from

¹⁹ John W. Slocum, “Who, and When, Were the Inorodtsy? The Evolution of the Category of ‘Aliens’ in Imperial Russia,” *The Russian Review* 57, no. 2 (April 1998): 173–90.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 185.

²¹ Charles Steinwedel, “The 1905 Revolution in Ufa: Mass Politics, Elections, and Nationality,” *The Russian Review* 59, no. 4 (October 2000): 555–76.

the legal to the political field during the last years of the tsarist regime was expressed through the occasional (though far from systematic) inclusion of such groups as the “Little Russians” or the Bessarabian Romanians within the widening ranks of untrustworthy “aliens.” On the other hand, nationalist activists appropriated this designation, seeking to undermine the legitimacy of imperial domination in the borderlands. This semantic inversion of the term’s pejorative meaning was increasingly frequent and rhetorically effective during World War I, when Russia’s imperial rivals were willing to facilitate the publication of anti-Russian manifestos and “pamphlet-like” writings by émigré organizations.²² In effect, the use of this category by “nationally minded” intellectuals and politicians occurred just as frequently as in official discourse and was more consistent. The government continued to oscillate between the initial legal and ethnically neutral interpretation of cultural distance and the term’s later meaning as a synonym for a narrow and exclusivist understanding of ethnicity as a mixture of the immutable criteria of blood and language. The dilemma between assimilation and exclusion was of course never resolved. It is characteristic of the complex nature of imperial practices and perceptions of otherness that Russian bureaucrats never achieved the full transition to such a radical re-reading of the empire’s multiethnic population.

The shifting interpretation of the concept of *inorodtsy* is but one instance of the changing structures and patterns of Russian imperial policy toward its subjects. At a more basic level, one can suggest several criteria to classify and differentiate between various peoples of the non-Russian periphery. The scholar Kappeler has offered the most detailed scheme for such differentiation between the core and periphery of the Romanov Empire. Initially, Kappeler insisted on a direct correlation between the proportion of the “Great Russian element” and the practices and perceptions of the imperial authorities toward the borderlands. This scheme was proposed within the framework of the transition from an essentially pre-modern and non-ethnic image of the empire’s populations (prevalent throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth century) to the more ethnically conscious and increasingly nationalistic mindset of the central government later in the nineteenth century. Kappeler identified seven broad peripheral regions within the empire that differed in terms of ethno-social structure and the population size of the dominant ethnic group. Bessarabia fell into two separate categories, which points to the importance of geographic and demographic factors in the makeup of this region. The bulk of its territory was part of the second

²² Slocum, “Who, and When, Were the Inorodtsy?,” 187–88. The role of J. Gabrys and the “League of the Alien Peoples of Russia” is especially revealing and will be discussed in more detail in the last chapter, as it is directly related to the Bessarabian case.

territorial layer, along with the Kingdom of Poland and Left-bank Ukraine. Southern Bessarabia, however, belonged to the “steppe region,” the major area of colonization and foreign settlement in the empire.²³ While this ethno-social classification is valuable insofar as it stresses the difference between the Western Borderlands and the eastern marches of the empire, it fails to account for the multiple criteria that the central authorities employed to assess a given ethnic group’s position in the hierarchy of the empire’s subjects. In the case of Bessarabia, it specifically focuses on the province’s ethnic structure without taking into account the circumstances of its integration into the empire and its peculiar borderland status during the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

Kappeler refined his scheme in a subsequent article²⁴ in which he identified three broad criteria for the construction of an informal hierarchy of non-Russian subjects: political loyalty, the estate hierarchy (in other words, the social dimension), and cultural development (which determined a group’s chances for assimilation into imperial high culture). If the first principle presupposed a shifting picture of perceived loyalty to the monarch and dynasty (with constants such as the Poles and the Jews occupying the lower rungs of political reliability in the Western Borderlands), the second element of this structure depended on “whether [the relevant community] possessed their own elites, whether those elites were loyal to the tsar, and whether they conformed to the model of the Russian nobility.”²⁵ This principle remained in operation until the 1860s when—due to the Russian monarchs’ increasingly suspicious attitude toward the nobility, their intense dislike for the Polish nobility in particular, who served as a scapegoat and as a potential instigator of revolt throughout the Western Borderlands, and the specific context of Central Asia’s military conquest, which did not grant equality to local leaders—the Romanov Empire abandoned its previous openness to the assimilation of foreign ruling elites. Finally, the cultural hierarchy, which assumed greater importance in the empire’s final decades, mingled pre-modern and modern forms of identification (such as religion and language) and “determined the degree of otherness (*altérité*) in the Russian Empire.”²⁶

Kappeler builds an interesting system of “concentric circles” stretching from the *inorodtsy*, whose cultural distance and racial otherness precluded their integration into the imperial system, through the adjacent circles of

²³ Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History*, chapter 4, esp. 115–25.

²⁴ Andreas Kappeler, “Mazepintsy, Malorossy, Khokhly: Ukrainians in the Ethnic Hierarchy of the Russian Empire,” in *Culture, Nation, and Identity: The Ukrainian-Russian Encounter, 1600–1945*, ed. Andreas Kappeler et al. (Edmonton: CIUS Press, 2003), 162–81.

²⁵ Kappeler, “Mazepintsy, Malorossy, Khokhly,” 165.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 169.

settled Muslim communities from the Volga and Urals region to non-Orthodox Christians, who might include groups as diverse as Gregorian Armenians, Catholic Poles, and Lutheran Germans of the Baltic Provinces. This system culminated with the three “circles” of the empire’s Orthodox population, consisting of an outer fringe of non-Slavs (Georgians, Greeks, Bessarabian Romanians, and Christianized Animists) and centered on the East Slavic population of the empire (here, Kappeler’s distinction between the “Great Russians” and the other elements of the “all-Russian nation” must be qualified since this distinction was certainly not present in the representations of most imperial officials).²⁷ His assertion that the Bessarabian elite was essentially “Russified” and “join[ed] the edge of the inner circle of Eastern Slavs,”²⁸ though apparently correct, obscures the much more complex interaction between local and central actors that never resulted in the Bessarabian nobility’s and intelligentsia’s complete identification with the Russian national project. However, the dual effect of the “concentric circles” system should be taken into account when researching the Bessarabian case.²⁹

Russian integration policies could be viewed in terms of a continuum, with a “model of the empire as a culturally homogeneous nation-state” at one end, while at the other end one could imagine “a resolutely non-national, multicultural empire that imposed no change of identity on its subjects, and that might even endeavor to minimize contact among different groups.”³⁰ This scheme functioned both on the peripheries and at the imperial center. The spatial and cultural boundaries of Russianness were no less fiercely contested than the more practical issues involved in integrating non-Russian subjects of the empire. A complex constellation of political, psychological, racial, linguistic, and other criteria entered this process of self-definition. The emergence of an image of *russkost*’ can be studied not only from the vantage point of central governmental institutions, but also from a peripheral standpoint, where such images coalesced and were tested against the opposition and resistance of competing projects. This approach proved especially fruitful in the case of the Western Borderlands, which became the focus of a recent trend in scholarship on the Russian Empire that one could call “revisionist.”³¹ This tendency was

²⁷ Ibid., 170–72.

²⁸ Ibid., 172.

²⁹ Kappeler thus summarizes his argument: “The further the ethnic group was from the Orthodox Russian center, the greater the legal, social, and political discrimination against its members, but the lesser the danger to its ethnic identity.” Ibid., 173.

³⁰ Geraci, *Window on the East*, 9.

³¹ Among the most recent and innovative works on the interaction between imperial and local actors in the Western Borderlands, one could cite, first of all, the com-

also a “deconstructive” reaction against the usual ideological implications of the term Russification that hardly contributed to balanced analyses in the past.

Proposing a new interpretive framework for the phenomenon of Russification,³² the Russian historian Alexei Miller has insisted that a black-and-white image of assimilatory processes in the Russian Empire is grossly inadequate. In the majority of the empirical cases of Russification, the proponents of such projects, in addition to using coercive measures, attempted to create a “positive motivation” at the local level.³³ Moreover, in certain regions of the empire Russification was perceived as a chance to participate in modernizing projects and as an instrument for local elites to enhance their standing in relation to the central authorities. It is important to emphasize that the instrumental character of Russification could provide the cultural resources needed to challenge the center, as was the case with Muslim intellectuals of the late nineteenth century who used their knowledge of Russian language and culture as a direct “shortcut” to access Western intellectual traditions.³⁴ As Miller concludes, it is crucial that scholars abandon the image of Russification as the interaction between a wholly passive and subordinated peripheral object and a unitary and disproportionately powerful center. Within the framework of his broader “situational approach” to historical analysis, Miller outlines the important difference

prehensive volume *Zapadnye okrainy Rossiiskoi Imperii* [The Western borderlands of the Russian Empire], eds. A. I. Miller and M. D. Dolbilov (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2006). Other important recent works include: Theodore R. Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863–1914* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996); Mikhail Dolbilov, *Russkii krai, chuzhaia vera: Etnokonfessional'naia politika imperii v Litve i Belorussii pri Aleksandre II* [Russian land, foreign faith: the empire's ethno-confessional policy in Lithuania and Belorussia during Alexander II's reign] (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2010); Darius Staliunas, *Making Russians: The Meaning and Practice of Russification in Lithuania and Belarus after 1863* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2007). Alexei Miller has written the most comprehensive, critical, and theoretically grounded “revisionist” approach to Russification. See his contributions in Alexei Miller, *The Romanov Empire and Nationalism: Essays in the Methodology of Historical Research* (Budapest–New York: CEU Press, 2008).

³² Alexei Miller, “Russification or Russifications?,” in Alexei Miller, *The Romanov Empire and Nationalism*, 45–65.

³³ Ibid., 52. This of course points to much broader issues regarding the motivations of central state agencies and local actors and their interaction. The extent to which motivations rather than policy outcomes should constitute the future research agenda is debatable.

³⁴ Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

between a wholesale conversion to Russian values and a pragmatic acceptance of the empire's official language as a means of career advancement or even as a method of subverting imperial discourse from inside.³⁵ Of course, this distinction was neither so clear-cut nor so important to contemporaries, but it should guide any study of individuals' or collectivities' attitudes toward and responses to Russification policies.

The various visions of the Russification of space had a significant impact on Bessarabia's status in the nineteenth century. If in the first half of the century this region was explicitly treated as a border province enjoying a separate (if underdeveloped by imperial standards) legal, institutional, and socio-cultural identity, in the second half of the century its status became much more ambiguous. Initially belonging to the category of self-governing entities of the empire (along with the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Finland), Bessarabia's image shifted to that of a borderland (*okraina*) religiously and culturally affiliated to the Russian core, but deemed ethnically and linguistically foreign (which persisted until the early twentieth century). It thus may be more fruitful to compare Bessarabia's status to that of Siberia³⁶ and Ukraine. The region's intermediate position on the mental map of the empire meant that Bessarabia could never be unambiguously claimed by Russian integrative projects.

Constructing the National Narrative in Romania: Models and Variations

The story of Romanian nation-building has been retold from many vantage points. The following discussion focuses on the emerging Romanian state's symbolic geography and the relative marginality of Bessarabia in national discourse (in comparison with Transylvania). This focus on the narratives of the nation devised in the Romanian Principalities, and then in the Romanian national state beginning in the 1860s, stems from two basic considerations. First, the competing Russian and Romanian projects aimed at the symbolic appropriation of Bessarabia were elaborated within the framework of intertwining intellectual currents and realpolitik state interests—a fact that, in the Romanian case, determined the close association of the leading proponents of “national development” with the

³⁵ Miller, “Russification or Russifications?,” 53.

³⁶ Mark Bassin, “Inventing Siberia: Visions of the Russian East in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 3 (June 1991): 763–94; and Anatolii Remnev, “Vdvinut' Rossiia v Sibir'. Imperiia i russkaia kolonizatsiia vtoroi poloviny XIX – nachala XX vv.” [Moving Russia into Siberia: Empire and Russian colonization in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century], *Ab Imperio* 3 (2003): 135–58.

wider political debates of the period. The peculiar Eastern European hybrid personality of the intellectual-politician had its place in the pre-World War I Romanian Old Kingdom as well.³⁷ This does not presuppose the total identification of the various intellectual trends with corresponding policies, or the subordination of intellectual preoccupations to immediate political interests. It does entail, however, an identification of the national state as the primary agent of fulfilling the national ideal, especially after the consolidation of Romania's international status in the 1870s and 1880s.

Second, Bessarabia, like Transylvania and Bukovina, represented an actual (or potential) target of Romanian irredentism. From this perspective, it seems more logical to discuss Bessarabia from the same central viewpoint of the Old Kingdom than to compare its place within the Romanian national narrative to the variations of the same narrative in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This does not diminish the relevance of Transylvanians' intellectual contributions to the emergence of Romanian nationalism. However, it does suggest that Romanian visions of Bessarabia were primarily articulated within the framework of the peculiar Moldo-Wallachian cultural context that differed significantly from the Transylvanian milieu.

Romanian historiography customarily associated the crystallization of national ideology (to the extent that such a unitary concept existed) with a progressive and "stage-like" development initiated by the educated Greek Catholic clergy of Transylvania in the late eighteenth century (the representatives of the so-called "Transylvanian School"). While this point is not contentious, its relationship to the parallel processes in the Danubian Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia (the later nucleus of the Romanian nation-state) is disputed. This is evident on at least two levels. First, the teleological implications of national historiography were hardly conducive to a balanced analysis of the proper context within which the Transylvanian clerics' preoccupation with origins, philology, and culture emerged. A recent synthetic case study of Romanian nationalism in the wider Eastern European framework—focusing on the issue of the heterogeneity and internal contradictions of the region's national discourses—argues that this initial instance of Romanian national self-assertion was a "side effect of the Counter-Reformation policies of the Ha[b]sburgs" in Transylvania and that it was characterized by an "attachment toward juridical procedures" generated by the influence of "the Ha[b]sburg enlightened bureaucratic

³⁷ For the notion in question and the intricate relationship between scholarship and politics in Eastern Europe, see Suny and Kennedy, *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation*; and Dennis Deletant and Harry Hanak, eds., *Historians as Nation-Builders: Central and Southeast Europe* (London: Macmillan, 1988).

culture.”³⁸ Besides the contrasting impact of the respective versions of Central European and Balkan Enlightenments on developments to the west and east of the Carpathians, the different cultural orientations of the fledgling Transylvanian and Moldo-Wallachian intelligentsias during the eighteenth century led to the appearance of two parallel (albeit not starkly opposed) frames of imagining the national community in the first half of the following century.³⁹

It is important, however, not to exaggerate the incompatibility of these narratives. Like their Russian counterparts in the symbolic competition for Bessarabia, nineteenth-century Romanian intellectuals referred to regional cultural “traditions” from a variety of perspectives. The previous century had witnessed the growing “discrepancies between Transylvania and the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia in every way, including such elusive domains as the social imaginary, self-identity, and symbolic geography.”⁴⁰ The rejection of the Transylvanian School’s “Latinist” doctrine in Moldavian and Wallachian intellectual circles and the attraction of the “symbolic order” of the Balkans until the early nineteenth century (at the same time as the latter category was constructed by the “Western gaze”) set the stage for a different pattern of cultural Westernization in the Danubian Principalities. The initial period witnessed the growing impact of the intermediary Russian model on the shifting cultural horizons of the local elites.⁴¹ Reaching its apex at the time of the

³⁸ Caius Dobrescu, “Conflict and Diversity in East European Nationalism, on the Basis of a Romanian Case Study,” *East European Politics and Societies* 17, no. 3 (2003): 393–414, here 395–96.

³⁹ Dobrescu even speaks of “profound and highly significant differences [between Transylvania and the Danubian Principalities] that result in parallel traditions of understanding the concepts, symbols, and policies of nationalism.” See *ibid.*, 396.

⁴⁰ Sorin Antohi, “Romania and the Balkans: From Geocultural Bovarism to Ethnic Ontology,” *Tr@nsit: Europäische Revue* 21 (2002): 1–2, accessed on April 3, 2008. <http://www.iwm.at/t-21txt8.htm>.

⁴¹ The issue of “Westernization through Petersburg” cannot be discussed here in detail. One of the most vivid and colorful illustrations (with a focus on everyday life) is provided by Neagu Djuvara in his *Între Orient și Occident. Țările Române la începutul epocii moderne (1800–1848)* [Between East and West: The Romanian lands at the beginning of the modern era, 1800–1848] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1995). For a Russian “Slavophile” perspective portraying the nineteenth-century Romanian present as the “Russian past” and condemning the unwittingly “Westernizing” role of Russian military occupations, see F. F. Vigel’, *Vospominaniia* [Memoirs], vol. 2 (Part 6) (Moscow: Zakharov, 2003), 1060–63. Needless to say, as in the case of the previous Greek model, Russian-imposed Westernization elicited contradictory reactions within Romanian society.

Organic Regulations⁴², the influence of the Russian factor gradually receded (despite, or perhaps due to, the empire's political leverage over the Principalities) until it was displaced by the direct emulation of the Western European (mainly French) political and cultural model.

Even before the 1848 events in Moldavia and Wallachia, the preeminence of French Romanticism (in its literary and scholarly forms), epitomized by the towering figures of Jules Michelet and Edgar Quinet, was gaining the upper hand. The future Romanian nation-builders who assumed a "liberal" political orientation (especially Ion C. Brătianu, D. Brătianu, and C. A. Rosetti) thus privileged a political understanding of the nation as a body of citizens enjoying equal rights and freedoms, and they envisioned an institutional reform agenda to restructure the Romanian political system rationally along Western lines. In this sense, 1848 was a watershed in the evolution of their political visions. The failure of social reformism in Wallachia during the short-lived revolutionary government did not altogether suppress the social utopian component of the "forty-eighters'" agenda, but it surely channeled their efforts toward the political and cultural dimensions of nation-building. The more balanced approach to the tasks of the incipient Romanian nation-state promoted by prominent representatives of the Moldavian elite (such as M. Kogălniceanu and Barbu Catargiu) was more indebted to German or (indirectly) British models of political equilibrium and social harmony. These competing visions of political and social development presaged the later crystallization of the Liberal and Conservative political groups, and also introduced significant variations into the emerging national narrative.⁴³

The "forty-eighters'" elaboration of a discourse on the essence of the Romanian nation (conceived mainly in civic and political terms) and the following re-elaboration of this model under the guise of the more "organic" scheme of the "national body," especially by the "Junimists" and their epigones (who eventually came to dominate pre-World War I discussions on issues of nationality), represent the conventional, albeit necessary, references for analysis.⁴⁴ While the dichotomy between modernizing and

⁴² The Organic Regulations were quasi-constitutional statutes elaborated for the Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia in the early 1830s during the Russian occupation, under the guidance of General Pavel Kisseleff.

⁴³ For an interesting discussion of the formative stage of Romanian conservatism in the context of Eminescu's analysis as a "conservative thinker," see Ioan Stanomir, *Reacțiune și conservatorism: Eseu asupra imaginărilor politice eminesciene* [Reaction and conservatism: An essay on Eminescu's political imaginary] (Bucharest: Nemira, 2000).

⁴⁴ The best summary of the debates on Romania's "models of development" is given in Keith Hitchins, *Romania 1866–1947* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 55–89. Despite the rich literature on individual thinkers and wider literary and

traditionalist intellectual trends undoubtedly structured contemporary debates on Romanian statehood and national development, the relationship between these competing schools of thought was never clear-cut or simply antagonistic. One characteristic example is the placing of the “Junimea” current within the late nineteenth-century intellectual climate. The piercing criticism of Titu Maiorescu’s vision of Romanian modernity by Eugen Lovinescu in his *Istoria civilizației române moderne* and the emphasis on the traditionalist or even regressive implications of the “Junimist” doctrine (as well as the highly personal and radical reworkings of its theses by later authors, such as Mihai Eminescu and Constantin Rădulescu-Motru), precluded the analysis of this trend as an alternative vision of the modern nation-state. The references of the “Junimists” were part of the “second West” of the late nineteenth century (represented by the Central European cultural model), and they were no less modern than the French-inspired rhetoric and practices of Romanian liberals.⁴⁵

Of course, any criticism of “normative modernity” cannot alter the peripheral character of the Romanian cultural elites’ position in relation to their Western counterparts. The several paths that modernity could theoretically follow in late nineteenth-century Europe were thus reflected in the peculiar Romanian context, which shaped the final form of the development debates in Romania. In an attempt to present a more complex classification of the variegated approaches to Romanian nation-building before and after 1914, Paul E. Michelson suggests the following division for the conflicting views on the Romanian Kingdom’s evolution: 1) the nationalist-traditionalist approach (represented mainly by the “samanatorist” school of Nicolae Iorga); 2) the evolutionary-conservative position (the “Junimists”); 3) the Socialist-Marxist view (promoted by Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea and his followers); 4) the “Poporanist” (Populist) current led by Constantin Stere and Garabet Ibrăileanu; and 5) the “Modernizers” (or Europeanizers), whose ideology only emerged after 1918 as a reaction to the radically altered postwar context. Before then, the preeminence of the

political trends, there is still no comprehensive treatment of the evolution of national discourse in pre-World War I Romania. A stimulating reassessment of certain thinkers that is especially concerned with problems related to Romania’s social and national peculiarities and their placement within a European context is given by Cristian Preda in C. Preda, *Contribuții la istoria intelectuală a politicii românești* [Contributions to the intellectual history of Romanian politics] (Bucharest: Meridiane, 2003), and in his introductory article to Constantin Rădulescu Motru, *Scriseri politice* [Political writings] (Bucharest: Nemira, 1998).

⁴⁵ The concept of the “two Wests” or the “bicephalous West” that emerged in the period between the 1870s and 1914 is elaborated in Martin Malia, *Russia under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2000), esp. 175–79.

Western European model was hardly challenged, even if different thinkers identified with different parts of the so-called Western tradition.⁴⁶

The opposition between the “Westernizing” and “autochthonist” tendencies shaped late nineteenth- and twentieth-century discussions of the Romanian national essence and nation-building. However, as the authors of a recent survey of post-1989 Romanian historiography astutely note, “in the post-1989 cultural space, the dichotomy between the two contrasting positions was not so sharp but was represented rather by a continuum of combinations ranging from one end of the political spectrum to the other.”⁴⁷ Keeping in mind the obvious differences, the same could be said about the pre-1914 period, when several schools vying for supremacy on the contested field of nationalist politics nevertheless held a number of common assumptions about Romania’s position with respect to the outer world and to the neighboring imperial polities. In this sense, it might be more fruitful to apply the concept of symbolic geography to Romanian intellectuals’ complex practices of self-identification both before and after World War I.

It would be difficult to argue against the contention that “in all three historical regions [Wallachia, Moldavia, and Transylvania] the formative experience behind the emergence of nationalism was similarly rooted in an attempt of emulating the ‘significant others,’ resulting in a profound identity crisis.”⁴⁸ The peculiarities of the national narrative in the three contexts derived as much from the shifting attitudes toward these “others” as from the latter’s perceived features. The importance of this analytical framework can also be linked to the overlapping symbolic geographies of the ideal homeland continuously reimagined by Romanian intellectuals over the last two centuries. During the early period of nation-building before 1914, the fusion of the intellectual and political activities of many Romanian elites lent additional immediacy to such mental constructs.

One of the most articulate manifestos arguing for the “establishment of a new research subject of symbolic geographies” in Romanian studies was recently issued by the innovative Cluj-based historian Sorin Mitu.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Paul E. Michelson, “Romanian Perspectives on Romanian National Development,” *Balkanistica: A Journal of Southeast European Studies* 7 (1981–82): 92–120, here 96.

⁴⁷ Iordachi and Trencsényi, “In Search of a Usable Past,” 415–53, see 418.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 424.

⁴⁹ Sorin Mitu, *Transilvania mea: Istorii, mentalități, identități* [My Transylvania: Histories, mentalities, identities] (Iași: POLIROM, 2006), esp. 80–85. Basing his approach on the classic works of Edward Said, Larry Wolff, and Maria Todorova, Mitu provides a definition of the concept for local use: “Symbolic geographies can be defined as mental representations of a political, historical, or cultural space, generated at the level of the social imaginary. These representations valorize the above-mentioned spaces, endowing them with features and characteristics of an emotional and ideological nature,” 81.

Though hailing from the tradition of “imagology” and the history of mentalities, Mitu has insisted on the broader application of this model to topics in political and intellectual history. The work of Sorin Antohi⁵⁰ and younger Romanian-born scholars, such as Marius Turda,⁵¹ has already pursued this research agenda. The foreign ideological models thus represented not only discrete instances of cultural transfer, but also shaped and constituted the underlying frames of national discourse. Antohi, for example, has convincingly shown that “the autochthonist canon constructs the discourse of Romanian specificity from imported ideological elements.”⁵² Moreover, Antohi has analyzed the most radical version of the Westernizing stances (epitomized by the strategy of “cultural bovarism”), as well as the most extreme and totalizing form of autochthonist discourse in the interwar period (reaching its apex in the “ethnic ontology” of the Romanian space) in relation to Romania’s “horizontal” and “vertical” escape from the stigmatized sphere of the Balkans.

At the same time, the Romanian perception of these alien and hostile geographical matrices was fraught with ambiguity. Whereas the Balkans might have elicited mixed feelings of rejection and attraction (synthesized in the motives of “inclusion,” “affinity,” and “sublimation”),⁵³ thereby serving as a persistent factor in the Romanian construction of the national self, the Habsburg and especially the Russian empires represented quintessential sources of alienation and threat. In this sense, the importance of 1848 as a symbolic threshold cannot be ignored. Aside from the Romanian revolutionaries’ attachment to the liberal, nationalist Mazzinian tradition (which regarded the Romanov Empire as the main obstacle to attaining universal freedom), the Russian military intervention of that year, and especially the Crimean War, marked the successive stages of the emergence of a markedly negative image of Russia.⁵⁴ The “Bessarabian question”

⁵⁰ Sorin Antohi, *Civitas imaginalis: Istorie și utopie în cultura română* [Civitas imaginalis: History and utopia in Romanian culture]; and especially in his aforementioned article, “Romania and the Balkans: From Geocultural Bovarism to Ethnic Ontology,” 3–4.

⁵¹ Marius Turda, “Aurel C. Popovici’s Nationalism and its Political Representation in the Habsburg Empire (1890–1910),” in *The Garden and the Workshop: Disseminating Cultural History in East-Central Europe*, ed. Marius Turda (Budapest–New York: CEU Press, 1999), 49–75; and Marius Turda, “Aurel C. Popovici and the Symbolic Geography of the Romanians of Transylvania in the Late Habsburg Empire (1890–1906),” *Revue Roumaine d’Histoire* 36, nos. 1–2 (1997): 97–121.

⁵² Iordachi and Trencsényi, “In Search of a Usable Past,” 441.

⁵³ Antohi, “Romania and the Balkans: From Geocultural Bovarism to Ethnic Ontology,” 2–15.

⁵⁴ An interesting, if incomplete, study (following the model of “imagology”) that traces the changing perceptions of Russia in Romanian literature between the

added to the anti-Russian thrust of incipient Romanian public discourse. The “otherness” of Russia was rhetorically enhanced by Romania’s participation in the Western tradition of Russophobia. Thus, Romania’s imagined belonging to the Latin (and civilized) West, combined with the persistent myth of Russian expansionism, provided the conceptual grid and the rhetorical arsenal that was later deployed in the symbolic competition over the contested territory of Bessarabia. However, even if the Russian Empire was portrayed as a menacing “other,” the impact of certain ideas from the Russian intellectual milieu remained significant. The Russian model of Westernization had been explicitly rejected or discarded by Romanian elites by the 1860s, but Russian experiences in “nihilism” or “populism” influenced central figures of Romanian nationalism such as B. P. Hasdeu and C. Stere and contributed to the articulation of Romanian discourse on Bessarabia. While they were clearly uncompromising in their opinions about the deleterious impact of Russian domination on the Bessarabian Romanian population, these ideologues’ visions of the Romanian nation-state struck an original chord in the late nineteenth-century Romanian intellectual environment.

Unfortunately, the Transylvanian case of imagining the nation cannot be discussed at length here. Still, it should be emphasized that the Habsburg factor played a prominent role in structuring the Romanian national imagination. First, the role of Transylvanian-born intellectuals and political activists both before and after the 1848 Revolution in articulating a national discourse in the Romanian Principalities was crucial, and their input infused this discourse with elements rooted in the Transylvanian context. Second, Transylvania serves as an even more important contrast and testing ground for Bessarabia’s role and significance in the Romanian national narrative. Beyond the customary (and largely accurate) generalization that Transylvania was, within Romanian national discourse, everything that Bessarabia was not (central versus marginal, articulate versus inarticulate, possessing a politically organized national movement versus a conspicuous lack of national mobilization), drawing parallels between the larger Russian and Habsburg contexts and their respective dilemmas of managing multi-ethnicity could provide significant insights into the complex process of imagining the nation in an imperial setting.⁵⁵

1840s and 1948 is Leonte Ivanov, *Imaginea rusului și a Rusiei în literatura română, 1840–1948* [The image of the Russian and Russia in Romanian literature, 1840–1948] (Chișinău: Cartier, 2004).

⁵⁵ Beyond the partial and generally biased accounts of pre-1989 Romanian historians, the most comprehensive works on the emergence and dynamics of the Romanian national movement in Transylvania (and its place within the Habsburg and European contexts) are: Keith Hitchins, *The Romanian National Movement in*

The central challenge when approaching the Transylvanian case from a national Romanian perspective is the overlap between national and imperial spaces on the mental maps of Romanian elites. In theory, as Sorin Mitu has observed, local intellectuals had at least three options for an imagined homeland that were, in principle, mutually exclusive, but could also be combined in various ways. The first entity that could reasonably claim their loyalty was the historical Grand Principality of Transylvania, which benefited from a long-standing historical and constitutional identity and could be organized either as a multiethnic political unit or as essentially Romanian (or, conversely, Hungarian) national space. However, in the absence of strong regionalist solidarities, this presupposed a direct clash between the Romanian and Hungarian national projects. The commonality of both stemmed from the emphasis on local circumstances and the rejection of an overall imperial framework. The second center of allegiance and legitimacy was the Habsburg Empire. Combining the traditional motif of dynastic loyalty and elements of modern conservative ideology, representatives of this current gradually began to support a federalist solution to the nationality question. Finally, the third homeland suggested by Transylvanian intellectuals consisted of territories inhabited by ethnic Romanians. However, before the formation of the Romanian nation-state they never imagined a common political structure and only envisioned unification through the Principalities' incorporation into the Habsburg Monarchy.⁵⁶

Even if this situation changed following the formation of the Romanian nation-state and under the impact of Hungarian nationalizing policies after the 1870s, relations between Transylvanian elites and the Romanian Kingdom's political establishment were never smooth. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was thus not only a significant "other," but also the main point of reference for some Transylvanian Romanian nationalist intellectuals (as was the case with Aurel C. Popovici before World War I). These options were not available for Bessarabian intellectuals. The absence of any local political traditions of autonomy, the general illiteracy of the Romanian-speaking population, Russian educational policy, and the chronic weakness of federalism in the Russian Empire precluded the articulation of local identity projects until the revolutionary events of 1917. Even if the au-

Transylvania, 1780–1849 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969); Idem, *A Nation Discovered: Romanian Intellectuals in Transylvania and the Idea of Nation, 1700–1848* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1999); and Idem, *A Nation Affirmed: The Romanian National Movement in Transylvania, 1860–1914* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1999).

⁵⁶ Mitu, *Transilvania mea*, 119–120. A fascinating account of the function of "identity mechanisms" in the case of the Transylvanian Romanians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can be found in Sorin Mitu, *National Identity of Romanians in Transylvania* (Budapest–New York: CEU Press, 2001).

tonomist debates of the period could be compared to similar developments in the Habsburg context, neither their sources nor their intensity could serve as the basis for a serious comparative analysis. The closest approximation to such an analysis might involve a comparative study of Transylvanian and Bessarabian emigration to the Romanian Kingdom before 1914, but this kind of investigation is a task for the future.

Bukovina was another borderland contested between the fledgling Romanian nation-state and the Habsburg Monarchy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Structurally, it resembled Bessarabia in many respects. Carved out of a former territory of the Moldavian Principality for primarily strategic reasons and endowed with a newly invented territorial identity, Bukovina's institutional and symbolic construction could be seen as a parallel instance of province-building in a multiethnic and multicultural imperial setting. The symbolic dimension is particularly relevant, with travel and travel writing playing an analogous role there as in the case of Bessarabia's integration into the Russian Empire forty years later. The new Habsburg province also became a privileged site for state-sponsored resettlement and colonization, just like its neighbor to the southeast.

However, Bukovina's evolution as a Habsburg province also displayed significant contrasts to the Bessarabian case. First, there was initially some uncertainty regarding the new province's borders and its relationship to Galicia, which led to a state of institutional flux throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. This culminated in Bukovina's proclamation as a separate crownland in 1849, but its status vis-à-vis Galicia remained a point of contention until World War I. Second, the status of the mostly Romanian regional elites, while insecure, was generally higher than that of the Bessarabian nobility after annexation. The most prominent boyar families were quickly incorporated into the imperial nobility and had greater room for negotiation with the center than their Bessarabian counterparts. They were also given more leverage as intermediaries, partly to counterbalance the Ruthenian national movement that became stronger in the last decades of the nineteenth century and was directly inspired by the model of the Galician "Piedmont." Third, the Romanian-dominated Church in Bukovina was a fundamental institution both in the political sphere (where it acted as a representative of the province's Romanian population) and in the economic domain due to its large landholdings that were recognized and legalized by the imperial authorities. The Church was a community-centered institution that reinforced local Orthodox identity in a non-Orthodox empire—in marked contrast to the Bessarabian case, where it served as an instrument of integration and minimized the cultural distance between rulers and subjects. Finally, after the creation of the Dual Monarchy in 1867, Bukovina became part of a very different imperial arrangement, which provided limited opportunities for articulating political posi-

tions and grievances in a more open and contested field than was imaginable in the Russian Empire, at least before 1905. The regional political elites (both Romanian and Ruthenian) quickly adapted to the new circumstances and were divided along ostensibly modern political lines by the early twentieth century.⁵⁷

The contrast with Bessarabia should perhaps not be taken too far. As one historian of the region suggests, although by the late nineteenth century a “provincial consciousness” (*Landesbewusstsein*) was discernible and was represented by a growing number of provincial institutions—most notably by Francis Joseph University in Czernowitz (Cernăuți/Chernivtsi), founded in 1875 to mark the one-hundredth anniversary of Bukovina’s annexation—it was still framed and articulated in a language determined by Vienna, not by the local population itself.⁵⁸ The Romanian population of Bukovina was less articulate and less visible within the hierarchy of national priorities, especially in comparison to Transylvania. Nevertheless, it was more significant for the Romanian national narrative than Bessarabia.

Bukovina’s greater symbolic importance in comparison to Bessarabia was apparent on several levels. Similar to Kosovo in the Serbian national imagination, Bukovina represented the sacred core of the Moldavian Principality, since most medieval monasteries associated with the “heroic” phase of Moldavian history during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were situated there (including the Putna Monastery, the burial site of Moldavia’s most acclaimed prince, Stephen the Great). This message was crucially important for Romanian national discourse, which was replete with historical references and the rhetoric of historical rights, but it was forcefully displayed on the occasion of the one-hundredth anniversary of Bukovina’s annexation by the Habsburgs in 1875, when elaborate commemoration ceremonies were staged both in Romania (especially in Moldavia) and in Bukovina itself. The 1875 ceremonies were larger in scale and more symbolically charged than similar displays of national mourning during the 1912 anniversary of Bessarabia’s “loss,” which was a clear indication of the two regions’ relative weight in the Romanian hierarchy of national priorities. This difference was also due to the greater visibility of intellectuals born in or associated with Bukovina within the Romanian national and cultural canon. The most conspicuous example was Mihai Eminescu, the Romanian national poet and one of the most important nationalist writers

⁵⁷ The most comprehensive, recent discussion of Bukovina’s emergence and “career” as an imperial province (as well as its symbolic, discursive, territorial, and institutional construction) is found in Kurt Scharf, “*Die Landschaft Bukowina*”: *Das Werden einer Region an der Peripherie, 1774–1918* (Vienna / Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2010).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

of the era (about whom more will be said below). Like their Transylvanian counterparts, the intellectuals with roots in Bukovina had a disproportionate impact (in terms of the region's size and overall significance for Romanian policy) on the construction of modern Romanian culture. This state of affairs further emphasized Bessarabia's marginality in this regard.

The case of Dobrogea might be an interesting point of comparison with Bessarabia's place within Romanian symbolic geography before World War I. This territory, situated between the Danube and the Black Sea and acquired by Romania as an unwelcome gift from the Russian Empire after the Berlin Congress of 1878, had at least two features in common with Bessarabia. First, long before its incorporation into the Kingdom it had been a multiethnic Ottoman borderland that was thrust unexpectedly into the homogenizing space of an emerging nation-state. Second, it was precisely the loss of Southern Bessarabia that caused this compensation to be envisaged in the first place, so the two regions were linked in Romanian policy and the national imagination.⁵⁹ Although Romanian political elites accepted it only reluctantly and were motivated primarily by economic considerations, Dobrogea's incorporation provided an excellent opportunity to articulate nation-building and assimilatory policies based on a "threefold mechanism composed of ethnic colonization, cultural homogenization, and economic modernization."⁶⁰ The cultural dimension included the symbolic construction of the new province, which underwent a spectacular transformation from a "foreign land populated by barbarous and warlike peoples" to an "ancient Romanian land" within just six months between March and September 1878 due to the rhetorical talent of Mihail Kogălniceanu, who found "traces of our Romanian ancestors . . . in every corner" of Dobrogea.⁶¹ Ironically, before switching sides due to pragmatic considerations, Kogălniceanu played an equally prominent role in developing the "pro-Bessarabian" argument in the controversy that pitted Romania against the Russian Empire earlier in 1878.

Dobrogea quickly became the object of a peculiar version of Romanian "internal Orientalism," not unlike the competing views on Bessarabia in Russian and Romanian sources of the time. Aside from the obvious "oriental" elements represented by the Turkic and Tatar inhabitants of this territory, the "metonymic Orientalism" practiced by the Romanian elites was linked to the civilizing mission of the Romanian state on the shores of the Black Sea. It was the "European mission" of the young Kingdom to intro-

⁵⁹ Constantin Iordachi, *Citizenship, Nation- and State-Building: The Integration of Northern Dobrogea into Romania, 1878–1913*, Carl Beck Papers, no. 1607 (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2002).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 13–14.

duce European civilization and high culture to this “backward, uncivilized part of the Orient,” and, in the process, consolidate its newly acquired political and cultural weight in the Balkans.⁶² Dobrogea was also hailed as the “California of the Romanians”—a “Romanian frontier” where the ethnic colonization sponsored by the center affirmed the nation’s vitality and potential for further expansion. The province was thus a testing ground for practices and discourses of nation-building that gradually transformed it into a part of the core, even if institutional integration was a piecemeal, prolonged, and uneven process that perpetuated discriminatory and exclusionary policies for over three decades. However, one cannot deny that “Romanian political elites implemented in Dobrogea a modernizing nationalist project, meant to confirm Romania’s integration into the West and to confer a legitimizing and progressive character to the assimilation process.”⁶³ Multiethnicity remained a formidable obstacle to the homogenizing vision of Romanian nation-builders,⁶⁴ just as in the case of Bessarabia, Transylvania, and Bukovina after 1918. Still, the apparent success of Dobrogea’s incorporation into the Romanian Kingdom was interpreted as a model to be emulated in other contexts, thereby disregarding the peculiarities of this borderland. Romanian national discourse created unity *ex nihilo*, ignoring the diversity of the peripheries and the complex imperial legacies that produced it.

The question of national priorities gradually became prominent in Romanian national discourse along with the Romanian Kingdom’s self-assertion as the center of cultural and political gravity for all Romanians residing in neighboring empires. Bessarabia occupied a subordinate position in the hierarchy of Romanian nation-building not only due to the peculiarities of the Russian imperial context, but also because of the internal dynamics of Romanian self-perception. Two other features also accounted for the discursive marginality of the province. First, the view of the Russian Empire as inimical to the Romanian element made Bessarabia a privileged target for the invocation of national victimhood (which was not counterbalanced by an activist stance on behalf of the tiny Bessarabian educated stratum).⁶⁵ Second, besides articulate Bessarabian émigrés, only a handful of Romanian intellectuals constructed a systematic argument for the symbolic

⁶² Ibid., 15.

⁶³ Ibid., 33.

⁶⁴ For an interesting analysis of the Romanian-Bulgarian conflict over (Southern) Dobrogea in the first half of the twentieth century, see also Alberto Basciani, *Un conflitto balcanico. La contesa fra Bulgaria e Romania in Dobrugia del Sud, 1918–1940* (Cosenza: Edizioni Periferia, 2001).

⁶⁵ This stands in contrast to Bukovina, where the framework of local (Galician) autonomy and the emergence of a public sphere facilitated the integration of Romanian elites into the political system of the Austrian Empire.

inclusion of the region into the “national body.” The prevalence of conservative and organicist views in Romanian national discourse also applied to the Bessarabian case. This is obvious from the work of two significant figures of Romanian nationalism that wrote extensively on the “Bessarabian question”: Mihai Eminescu and Nicolae Iorga.

The position of the two authors might be best described under the label “integral nationalism.” This term emphasizes not so much their substantive similarities as it does the paradigmatic importance of their interpretations of nationalism for later authors. Eminescu’s most consistent position on the “Bessarabian issue” can be found in the series of articles he published in the aftermath of the 1877–78 Russian-Ottoman War. Thus, his public position emerged during the public debates concerning the priorities of Romania’s national project. His close affiliation with the Junimist faction within the Conservative Party and his generally pro-German political views shaped the terms he used and the explicit references most prevalent in his articles.⁶⁶ One of the most expressive examples of his appeal to national autarchy and the doctrine of “self-reliance” in domestic and foreign policy can be found in the last phrases of Eminescu’s work *Bucovina și Basarabia*, where he states: “Our slogan is: not to hope for anything and not to fear anything. If we do not hope for anything, we do not need to invest our confidence in others [any longer], as we have done in the past; [we can only have confidence] in ourselves and in those who are forced to take our part; if we fear nothing, we do not need to implore generosity in places where this [virtue] is an exotic plant.”⁶⁷ While this latter remark is clearly meant as an accusation against the Western world and Russian policy, Eminescu’s confidence in the civilizing mission of the Romanian nation-state in the region remained unshaken. Indeed, his xenophobic tendencies only reinforced it.

Placing Eminescu’s work within his contemporary intellectual context is complicated by the eclectic and fragmentary nature of his political views. Though often invoked as one of the “founding fathers” of Romanian autochthonism, he in fact defies such a neat categorization. Eminescu arrived at radical conclusions regarding the “individuality” of the “national soul”

⁶⁶ See his series of articles entitled “Bessarabia” (a “historical overview” of Bessarabian history until the nineteenth century) and “Tendencies of Conquest” (a virulent critique of Russia’s “designs” in the Balkans) in M. Eminescu, *Opere*, vol. 10 (Bucharest: Editura Academiei RSR, 1989). These articles have been republished as Mihai Eminescu, *Bucovina și Basarabia: Studiu politico-istoric* [Bukovina and Bessarabia: A political-historical study] (Bucharest: Editura Academiei de Înalte Studii Militare, 1991). His articles related to the 1878 Russian-Romanian controversy over Southern Bessarabia can be found in Mihai Eminescu, *Basarabia* [Bessarabia] (Chișinău: Hyperion, 1991).

⁶⁷ Florin Rotaru, ed., *Basarabia Română: Antologie* [Romanian Bessarabia: An anthology] (Bucharest: Semne, 1996), 26.

through his organic understanding of the Romanian “ethnic essence.” Since the invocation of the significant “other” is a necessary precondition for defining the collective self, it is logical that Eminescu, a political journalist, insisted on the special danger that Russian domination represented to the survival of the Romanian nation. In characteristic fashion, he contrasted the pragmatic and ultimately benevolent policy of the Habsburgs in Bukovina to the pernicious effects of Russian administration in Bessarabia. Thus, he stated: “Russia is not content with taking a large and beautiful part of Moldavia’s hearth; it is not content with trespassing the natural boundary [*granița firească*] of the Romanian land;⁶⁸ it also desires to take the souls that dwell on this land and to digest [*să mistuiască*] a part of the Romanian people.”⁶⁹ The presentation of this existential peril was undergirded by the writer’s radical ethnocentrism interspersed with racial overtones that gave Eminescu’s nationalism its xenophobic and radical flavor.

Claiming that the relative weight of the “Romanian element” in the overall scheme of humanity far surpassed that of the Russians, Eminescu did not refrain from arguing that “the nine million Romanians have assembled over the centuries more numerous and more beautiful treasures than ninety million Russians will ever be able to assemble.”⁷⁰ Even the cultural superiority of the Romanians was not enough, however, since the competition for Bessarabia was rooted in deeper characteristics of the immutable “national essence.” Eminescu thus introduced into his argument elements of an ethnic and racial hierarchy that precluded any peaceful outcome to the conflict between Romania and the Russian Empire. The Russian-Romanian rivalry was irreconcilable in his view because “every time the Russians will come into contact with us, they will feel the superiority of our [ethnic] individuality, be offended by this feeling and hate us more and more.”⁷¹ This undiluted rhetoric of “ethnic warfare” can be linked not only to Eminescu’s own interpretation of radical ethnicity in the Romanian context, but also to the European-wide impact of Social Darwinism that postulated the “struggle for existence” of discrete ethnic blocs as the norm for human relations in the late nineteenth century.⁷²

Eminescu’s radicalism has been often invoked as a factor precluding his ideological placing within the context of the liberal-conservative divide in late nineteenth-century Romanian politics. This uneasiness was com-

⁶⁸ In other words, the Dniester River.

⁶⁹ Eminescu, *Bucovina și Basarabia*, 142.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² For an illuminating analysis of how different yet connected nationalisms appropriated the racial implications of Social Darwinism for their own purposes, see Marius Turda, “‘The Magyars: A Ruling Race’: The Idea of National Superiority in Fin-de-Siècle Hungary,” *European Review of History* 10, no. 1 (2003): 5–33.

pounded by his constant criticism of the entire political establishment that virtually transformed him into an outcast among the contemporary intellectual-cum-political elite. Nevertheless, one can justifiably argue that Eminescu (in his guise as a political journalist) was fundamentally a conservative thinker. His often disconcerting style and rhetorical explosions, as well as his “summary xenophobic determinism coexist with certain pages in which his reflections are remarkably adequate to the subject of discussion, while Eminescu’s variety of conservatism rediscovers the great topics of the European conservative mental universe.”⁷³ While his references might range from de Maistre to Tocqueville, especially in regard to the political model of an ideal Romanian state, his anti-Semitic vituperations could be (and in fact were) easily reappropriated by the twentieth-century radical Right.⁷⁴ Another dimension of Eminescu’s anti-modern and radical political agenda included a regressive utopian component that was visible not only in his literary output, but also in his “false historicism.”⁷⁵ Other analyses have highlighted more straightforward motives linked to the conservative mindset, such as Eminescu’s traditionalism and his genuine “historicism” that extolled the “productive classes” of Romanian society and posited an ideal continuity of a national Romanian elite that had been supplanted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by a rapacious, cosmopolitan, and essentially foreign ruling class.⁷⁶

The coexistence of strikingly different societal and mental models in Eminescu’s work could of course be attributed to the immaturity of the Romanian social and political tradition that borrowed from Western sources uncritically. However, Eminescu’s incomplete fusing of these elements was peculiar enough to warrant scholarly analysis of him as an independent thinker. Applying this scheme to his journalistic works on the “Bessarabian question,” it is obvious that the arguments of historical rights and ethnic continuity could be mutually reinforcing. Though the author occasionally couched his arguments in legalistic terms, the predominance of the language of historical rights, which synthesized historical continuity and a radical interpretation of organic ethnicity, remained unchallenged.⁷⁷

⁷³ Ioan Stanomir, *Reacțiune și conservatorism*, 31–32.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁷⁵ Regarding Eminescu’s utopianism, one work that moves beyond the almost ritual invocations of his “cult for the past” and attempts to conduct a comprehensive analysis is Sorin Antohi, “Utopia lui Eminescu” [Eminescu’s utopia], in *Civitas imaginalis*, 117–52.

⁷⁶ For this kind of argument, see Mihai Dorin, *Civilizația românilor în viziunea lui Eminescu* [The Romanians’ civilization in Eminescu’s view] (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1998), esp. 26, 40.

⁷⁷ For an uncritical review of Eminescu’s polemics on the “Bessarabian question” (providing valuable intertextual information), see D. Vatamaniuc, *Publicistica lui*

Eminescu's reception by later nationalist writers and activists is no less important than his own contributions. Despite the influence that his work had on such early twentieth-century thinkers as Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, Eminescu's credentials as a nationalist were not taken for granted in the interwar period.⁷⁸ The reassessment of the writer's intellectual legacy by the interwar generation of "revolutionary traditionalists" (above all, by the young Mircea Eliade) invested Eminescu's xenophobic nationalism with a centrality that it did not have within the late nineteenth-century national narrative. The "Bessarabian question" was but one manifestation of this type of nationalism. However, Eminescu was the first author to construct a systematic argument for Bessarabia's symbolic inclusion in the national canon. The centrality of the Bessarabian factor, as well as the autochthonist themes pervading most of his nationalist pronouncements, allow one to identify a specific variant of "integral nationalism" in Eminescu's political journalism. Even if indebted to his Junimist mentors, his vision of the national organism is distinct among late nineteenth-century Romanian images of the nation.

An emphasis on culture and tradition as the main repositories of national identity and a reluctance to accept the economic and political consequences of modernization were especially prevalent among the conservative-traditionalists grouped around the historian Nicolae Iorga, who emerged as the main authority on the "Bessarabian question" in the early twentieth century. As one of the first scholars of Iorga's contributions to national discourse noted, "nationalism, for Iorga, was a distinctive consciousness and sympathy, a completely different way of understanding and judging, and not simply an adjunct to any particular type of political ideology (thus, he maintained that one could not be a nationalistic 'conservative' or a 'liberal' nationalist)."⁷⁹ Besides the "persistent factors" of "language, soil, race, and ideas," Iorga held that the Romanian "national spirit . . . was fundamentally a combination of past political events, tradition, and above all else culture."⁸⁰ The notion of "culture," which was central to Iorga's concept of the nation, was embodied not so much in the artificial and "corrupted" high culture imported by the 1848 generation from false

Eminescu (1877–1883, 1888–1889) [Eminescu's political journalism, 1877–1883, 1888–1889] (Bucharest: Minerva, 1996), 147–59.

⁷⁸ Thus, the author of a comprehensive survey of "Eminescu's nationalism," constructed as an inventory of themes and recurrent elements of his vision of the nation, still had to grapple with the "ignorance" of his contemporaries in this regard. See D. Murărașu, *Naționalismul lui Eminescu* [Eminescu's nationalism] (Bucharest: Pacifica, 1994).

⁷⁹ William O. Oldson, "Nicolae Iorga: The Romanian Nationalist as Historian," *East European Quarterly* 6, no. 14 (January 1973): 473–86, here 475.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 476.

Western models, but in the organic heritage of folk culture preserved by the peasantry. Iorga's brand of conservative and traditionalist peasantism (loosely synthesized in the doctrine of "samanatorism") emphasized not so much the material impact of modernity but rather its deleterious effect on the national essence. The peasantry that Iorga extolled in his political writings was first and foremost a moral entity on which the construction of a viable Romanian nation-state could be based.⁸¹

Indeed, Iorga might seem to be the exact opposite of Eminescu in terms of his position within the Romanian intellectual establishment and national discourse. Both his political preferences and his institutional impact seem to invalidate any meaningful comparison with Eminescu as a practitioner of the national narrative. Nevertheless, their writings on the "Bessarabian question" exhibit striking similarities that are worth examining. Iorga's historical erudition and extensive professional training invested his works on Bessarabia with an aura of scholarly prestige that consecrated them as the most authoritative response to contemporary Russian works that sought to legitimize Bessarabia's inclusion within the Russian empire-building project. In these works and especially in his various articles scattered throughout the journals he edited or contributed to—*Sămănătorul* (The Sewer) and *Neamul Românesc* (The Romanian Nation)—he developed a picture of Bessarabia that owed as much to his political agenda and to his imagination as to the actual data that he collected as a scholar and an occasional traveler through the region (his travel notes featuring his personal impressions and historically inspired musings can be found in the collection of his works on Bessarabia entitled *Neamul Românesc în Basarabia*).⁸² His visions of the region are replete with exalted images of the local peasantry as the bearers of the national essence and the only bulwark against the Russifying tendencies of the Russian autocratic state. One of his characteristic passages, which amounts to a passionate claim for Bessarabia's integration into Romanian national space, reads as follows:

In this *guberniia* that stretches from the Prut to the Dniester rivers sung in our folk songs [*doinele*], from the fortress of Hotin, where the stones are . . . only connected through the best of our blood, which, having dried up centuries ago, became as solid as bronze, to the mother-Danube; in this broad, fertile, bright

⁸¹ For a detailed biography of Nicolae Iorga focusing on his nationalist politics, see Nicholas M. Nagy-Talavera, *Nicolae Iorga: A Biography* (Iași: Center for Romanian Studies, 1998). For an interesting analysis of the wider implications of Iorga's nationalism, see Constantin Iordachi, "Nicolae Iorga and the Paradigm of Cultural Nationalism," *Balkanistica*, Special Millennial Issue, 13, no. 1 (2000): 167–74.

⁸² Nicolae Iorga, *Neamul Românesc în Basarabia* [The Romanian nation in Bessarabia], 2 vols. (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1995).

guberniia, there are towns [*târguri*] of Jews and Russians and Bulgarians and Old Believers [*lipoveni*] and Greeks and Germans and so many other foreign peoples. But all these towns are nothing, in beauty, in value, in labor, and in hard-striving and tormented antiquity, compared to the many hundreds of white villages, which blossom on every plain, on every golden stubble field, on every green pasture, on every cornfield burnt by drought, on every orchard full of crops. Those who live in these villages are tall, handsome, tender-faced, and sweet-tongued people, [they are] people full of charity and compassion for every misfortune, full of feeling for every suffering, obeying the state power that they deem sent by God to test His chosen ones . . . Those people are Romanians.⁸³

Iorga even implies that the Bessarabian Romanians are truer to their essence than the inhabitants of the Old Kingdom due to the pristine conditions of their everyday life and to the “Russian patriarchal mores” that left few traces on Bessarabian villages. He became a prominent advocate of cultural activism and of raising the Romanian public’s awareness of the “Bessarabian problem,” but he did not insist on an irredentist agenda prior to World War I.⁸⁴ His ambiguous role as the embodiment of official nationalism made him vulnerable to attacks both from the left (in his polemics with Stere) and from the right (in the scathing critique to which his position was subjected in Rădulescu Motru’s writings).⁸⁵

Iorga’s stance on Bessarabia is also important for two additional reasons. First, a comparison of his image of Bessarabia with Russian works of the same period proves the extent to which similar rhetorical devices were used in both cases, albeit with opposite goals. The picture he draws of the Russian Empire also deserves particular attention since it exhibits all the contradictions that a definition of empire presupposes (military strength versus inherent weakness, claims to civilization versus backwardness and arbitrariness, the vastness of physical space versus the “spiritual imprisonment” of its subjects). Second, Iorga figured prominently in the events and demonstrations designed to construct a Romanian alternative to the official Russian celebration narrative of 1912, and he was one of the few Romanian public figures who attempted to refute the official Russian views. Thus, alongside Eminescu’s openly polemical pronouncements, Iorga’s writings offer a foundational narrative that other writers from the Old Kingdom and Bessarabian-born émigrés had to take into account when introducing their own variations on Romanian national discourse on Bessarabia.

The complex dynamics involving Western models, local responses, and competing symbolic geographies of the imagined nation left their mark on

⁸³ Rotaru, *Basarabia Română: Antologie*, 28.

⁸⁴ This did not mean that his activities as president of the League for the Cultural Unity of All Romanians did not indirectly imply such an agenda.

⁸⁵ Rădulescu Motru, *Scriseri politice*.

the rhetorical contest over Bessarabia. Even if it emerged at certain points of high symbolic tension (and more systematically in the early twentieth century), the marginal discourse on the Russian-controlled territory followed the same rules and encountered the same dilemmas as the more central components of Romania's troubled and uneven nation-building efforts before World War I.

Russian Imperial Visions and Policies in Bessarabia between the 1860s and World War I

Immediately after the emergence of the Bessarabian province on the map of the Russian Empire in 1812, an intense period of discursive and symbolic construction followed. During the first decades following the annexation Bessarabia was portrayed as an exotic borderland, essentially different from the Russian interior. In fact, Bessarabia became an object of Orientalist imagery, characteristically mixing the topoi of backwardness, impressive natural riches and beautiful landscapes, a welcoming southern climate, and abundant resources, coupled with less appealing features associated with a "semi-savage" land. The exaltation of the new province's natural and material wealth and the portrayal of the dangers that it harbored exoticized the region and made it attractive for intrepid travelers.⁸⁶ This narrative presupposed the continued relevance and salience of the Ottoman legacy, which was still visible in the discourse of Russian observers during the first two decades of Russian provincial administration. During this period, Bessarabia still featured as a part of the Romanian-inhabited area and was only slightly differentiated from the larger patterns of narration and description used for Moldavia and Wallachia.⁸⁷

The situation changed significantly in the second half of the nineteenth century when travelogues and other subjective accounts were replaced by purportedly neutral forms of rational knowledge associated with modern ethnography and statistics. On the one hand, the ambiguous discourse emanating from the center was determined by the competition between the "imperializing" and the "nationalizing" visions within the Russian Geographical Society.⁸⁸ On the other hand, this ambiguity was due to the im-

⁸⁶ For a detailed account of the mechanisms involved in Bessarabia's image construction, see Andrei Cusco [Kushko], Victor Taki, and Oleg Grom, *Bessarabiia v sostave Rossiiskoi Imperii (1812–1917)* [Bessarabia as a part of the Russian Empire, 1812–1917] (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2012), ch. 2, 70–82.

⁸⁷ Victor Taki, "Moldavia and Wallachia in the Eyes of Russian Observers," *East-Central Europe/L'Europe Du Centre-Est. Eine wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift* 32, no. 2 (2005): 199–224.

⁸⁸ Nathaniel Knight, "Science, Empire, and Nationality: Ethnography in the Russian Geographical Society, 1845–1855," in *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the*

PLICIT comparison between the situation facing the Bessarabian population and the status of their Romanian counterparts from the Old Kingdom, who represented the eternally present absence in the majority of Russian works on Bessarabia. Russian scholarship, endowed with greater authority due to its claim to expertise, was no less ambiguous than the official stance. However, from the 1890s onward some works written for the broader public were much more consistent in advocating for the Russification (*obrusenie*) of the native, non-Russian population and sought to overcome the dilemma of legitimizing Russian rights over Bessarabia by either denying or downplaying the “otherness” of Bessarabian Romanians.⁸⁹ While Bessarabia was undoubtedly an object of imperial Russian discourse, this discourse itself was much less monolithic and much more reactive than is generally admitted. Russian ethnography, though it represented one of the preferred instruments of imperial knowledge production and a means through which the imperial state could observe its subjects from an appropriate cultural distance, was at the same time a destabilizing factor for imperial unity due to the attention it drew to the human diversity within the empire.

Another feature that reveals the complexity of the Bessarabian case is linked to the institutional milieu within which local professional ethnographers worked. Despite its consistent attempts to coordinate the ethnographic research agenda in the region, the direct role of the Russian Geographical Society in promoting a Russian agenda in Bessarabian ethnography was minimal. If on a conceptual level the ethnographic section of the Society played a significant role—for example, in elaborating the overall research scheme, producing specialized questionnaires, and so forth—the process of data collection and analysis was much more decentralized. Any possible explanation for this phenomenon must take into account the Odessa Historical and Antiquarian Society’s active involvement in professional ethnographic research. While providing its own significant expertise as part of its service to the Russian state, this scholarly institution displayed a greater degree of flexibility and sensitivity toward local peculiarities. Its deep immersion in the local public sphere allowed its collaborators to devise research techniques and agendas that were less tied to the

Empire, ed. Jane Burbank and David L. Ransel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 108–41.

⁸⁹ For example, see P. N. Batiushkov, ed., *Bessarabiia: Istoricheskoe opisanie* [Bessarabia: A historical description] (St. Petersburg: “Obshchestvennaia Pol’za,” 1892), 172–75. Some insights concerning the “inappropriateness” of such opinions for orthodox interpretations of Soviet historiography can be gauged from the moderately critical analysis found in the work of O. S. Lukianets, *Russkie issledovateli i moldavskaia etnograficheskaia nauka v XIX-nachale XX v.* [Russian researchers and Moldavian ethnographic science during the nineteenth and early twentieth century] (Chişinău: “Ştiinţa,” 1986), 70.

nationalizing paradigm dominant in Russian ethnography at the time.⁹⁰ Though the archeological dimension of the Society's activities determined its special interest in the material and spiritual artifacts that could be linked to the native population's archaic customs and traditions, the basic worldview of the majority of its collaborators was more akin to the relatively balanced scholarly attitude of the universalistic paradigm.

Statistics was another important arena for the production of imperial knowledge on the Bessarabian borderland. Starting in the mid-nineteenth century, officers of the Russian General Staff entrusted with the collection of statistical data became increasingly interested in Bessarabia. This tendency epitomized Bessarabia's integration into the core of the empire since these inquiries were carried out in the region in conjunction with similar investigations in the neighboring territories of New Russia and the "Little Russian" *gubernii*s. The most important statistical works focusing on the region of New Russia and Bessarabia—such as the volumes edited by Skal'kovskii, Daragan, and especially A. Zashchuk⁹¹—contain rather extensive and well-structured ethnographic discussions of the Bessarabian population. The studies in question were not directly affected by the conceptual battles raging within the Russian Geographical Society during this period; instead, they display the older, traditional approach of imperial and universalistic scholarship. This folkloric approach focused on creating a detailed inventory of local customs and practices of everyday life (*byt'*) and sought a certain degree of accommodation with the empire's cultural and ethnic diversity.

From the 1890s onward, a more politicized stance began to dominate Russian accounts of Bessarabia. This tendency can be linked to Russian nationalists' growing interest in the Western Borderlands of the empire and to the perception of a growing Romanian irredentist threat in Bessarabia. This change of emphasis in the discursive sphere is visible in two major works published in the late 1890s and early 1900s, which attempted to legitimize Russian rule in the province by constructing coherent narratives of its history and contemporary role within the empire.⁹² Batiushkov's vol-

⁹⁰ For a detailed description of this institution's role, see Lukianets, *Russkie issledovaniia*, 34–38.

⁹¹ A. Skal'kovskii, *Opyt statisticheskogo opisaniia Novorossiiskogo kraia* [An attempt at a statistical description of the New Russia region] (Odessa, 1850–1853); M. Daragan, *Voenno-statisticheskoe obozrenie Rossiiskoi Imperii. Bessarabskaia Oblast'* [A military-statistical review of the Russian Empire: The Bessarabian region] (St. Petersburg, 1849); and A. Zashchuk, *Materialy dlia geografii i statistiki Rossii, sobrannye ofitserami General'nogo shtaba. Bessarabskaia oblast'* [Materials on the geography and statistics of Russia collected by officers of the General Staff: Bessarabian region] (St. Petersburg, 1862).

⁹² Batiushkov, ed., *Bessarabiia: Istoricheskoe opisanie*; and Pavel Krushevan, ed., *Bessarabiia: geograficheskii, istoricheskii, statisticheskii, ekonomicheskii, literaturnyi i*

ume is particularly revealing for its pan-Slavist discourse that was prevalent in contemporary Russian accounts of the region. In his book, Bessarabia is described as a quintessentially Slavic land, which was subjected to Romanian influence but nevertheless preserved its Slavic character. It is striking to what extent this narrative deployed the theme of “recuperating a native Russian land” from foreign influence that was elaborated earlier in the case of the Western Borderlands.⁹³ The strategy of minimizing the “otherness” of Bessarabia’s Romanian-speaking population rested on two assumptions. First, this community was perceived as alienated from its original Slavic essence due to the late migration of Romanians from the west—a process which assimilated the original inhabitants linguistically, but did not completely eliminate the purportedly Slavic elements in their everyday life and culture (*byt*). Second, the editors of the description emphasized the centrality of Orthodoxy, which bound the “Moldavians” to the Russians (and therefore to the imperial core) and made them an easy target for full integration. Since Orthodoxy was closely associated with Russianness, it became a standard feature in depictions of the local population’s loyalty to the empire. However, even in this account one can detect a growing sense of insecurity concerning the effectiveness of Russification. The Moldavians’ linguistic “otherness” was a serious obstacle that defied the expectations of even the most enthusiastic Russifiers. This sense of insecurity was reinforced by the perceived threat of Romanian nationalism, which surfaced in the early twentieth century. Thus, in the last decade before World War I, Bessarabia was no longer viewed as a safe borderland from the center’s perspective.

After the annexation of the eastern part of the Moldavian Principality in 1812, a protracted period of integration into the imperial system followed. Before the abolition of autonomy in 1828 and the liquidation of the customs barrier on the Dniester in September 1830, the newly acquired province retained its unique status within the empire’s structure. During the period of autonomy, this was enhanced by the institutions of (partial) self-government granted by the Statute of 1818, which allowed noble elites to participate more directly in local affairs. Though these institutions were soon curtailed or abolished, the process of administrative uniformization was gradual. The 1860s were a crucial period in this regard. Bessarabia was fully incorporated into the Russian legal system by the late 1860s once the

spravochnyi sbornik [Bessarabia: A collection of geographical, historical, statistical, economic, literary, and informative data] (Moscow: A. V. Vasil’ev, 1903).

⁹³ However, it becomes less surprising if one considers that the volume in question was part of a larger series of “descriptions” of contested borderlands, including neighboring Podolia. This publication can be placed within the same logic of a gradually nationalizing language of empire.

agrarian reform statutes and *zemstvo* regulations were extended to the area. In addition to their pragmatic importance, these acts were highly symbolic since they incorporated Bessarabia into the central *gubernii*s of the Russian heartland (the *zemstvo* legislation was not introduced in the problematic Western Borderlands).

However, the application of the Great Reforms in Bessarabia included certain peculiarities that preserved its inherently ambiguous status within the empire. Thus, the regulation on the Bessarabian peasants, approved by Alexander II on July 14, 1868, to adapt the 1861 legislation on the abolition of serfdom to local circumstances, had to contend with a markedly different structure of land property and agriculture. In addition to the absence of serfdom in the region, this difference stemmed from the allotment of land to individual households (as opposed to the peasant communes in most of central Russia), which led to increased social stratification in villages and the emergence of a stratum of relatively prosperous peasants. The *zemstvo* reform introduced in Bessarabia on October 13, 1869, (somewhat later than in the central provinces) had mixed results at the provincial level. While undoubtedly intended as an effective means of streamlining local government and furthering administrative integration, the *zemstvos* provided a forum for public debate and a platform for collective action that could be used as a basis for political mobilization. This became apparent in the early twentieth century, especially during the revolutionary crisis of 1905–6 when the Bessarabian *zemstvos* assumed an active political role (indeed, the same situation was repeated on a larger scale in 1917). Despite their positive impact in the field of social welfare, education, and public works, the *zemstvos* did not fulfill their initial goal of bringing trusted representatives of local communities into the administration. The educated strata became more fragmented as the nineteenth century drew to a close and ultimately fractured along ideological lines during the revolutionary turmoil of 1905–7. The process of administrative integration into the empire culminated in the transformation of Bessarabia into a regular *guberniia* (sanctioned by the tsar on October 28, 1873) and the introduction of general military conscription the following year. A degree of institutional diversity within Bessarabia was restored after the reintegration of the Ismail district in 1878. Despite pressure to apply imperial legislation uniformly throughout the province, the southern district was left as an anomaly in the Russian legal system, preserving its Romanian communal and judicial structure.

Bessarabia's demographic situation at the end of the nineteenth century reflected the multiethnic and predominately rural character of its population. According to the mostly reliable statistical data provided by the 1897 all-imperial census, the Bessarabian *guberniia* had 1,935,412 inhabitants. The proportion of the rural population was overwhelming (84.8%, as op-

posed to 15.2% urban dwellers). The ethnic makeup of the population was highly diverse.⁹⁴ Thus, the distribution of major ethnic groups was the following: “Moldavians” (47.6%), “Little Russians” (19.6%), Jews (11.8%), Great Russians (8%), Bulgarians (5.3%), and Germans (3.1%). Demographically, the Romanian-speaking community dominated the central and most northern districts; “Little Russians” were the majority in the Hotin district of northwestern Bessarabia, while descendants of Bulgarian and German colonists were concentrated in the south. Bessarabia’s duality (with its southern part resembling the neighboring steppe regions of New Russia) ceased to play an important role by the late nineteenth century, but it did not disappear altogether. Another discrepancy between these different ethnic groups proved to be much more consequential for the potential success of the rhetorical strategies of the two competing projects. Literacy rates, while generally rather low, varied widely according to gender and ethnicity. The variations in this respect could be quite significant. Thus, German colonists were unsurprisingly the most literate group in Bessarabia (with figures around 63% for both men and women), closely followed by Poles (with 55.6% male literacy), and Jews (49.6% male literacy, but only 21.1% female literacy). By contrast, “Little Russians” and Romanians—the most rural and traditional groups in Bessarabian society—were at the lowest end of the spectrum (with rates of 15.3% and 3.1% for the former and 10.5% and 1.7% for the latter).⁹⁵ Moreover, literacy in Russian was difficult to assess objectively and could be best described as partial literacy. Besides the obvious conclusion that the largely illiterate peasantry was a poor target for any kind of imperial or national mass mobilization, this situation should be linked to the Russian government’s incoherent and inefficient educational policy in Bessarabia throughout most of the nineteenth century.

In this respect, the administration faced a major dilemma that was neither resolved nor even seriously addressed. The network of Russian educational institutions was rather insignificant and had a minor effect on the rural masses (in contrast to the much more structured school system of the Habsburg Empire). For instance, a report filed by the chief of the Odessa

⁹⁴ These data (as well as the following figures on literacy) are drawn from *Pervaia vseobschaia perepis' naseleniia Rossiiskoi Imperii. III. Bessarabskaia guberniia* [The first general census of the population of the Russian Empire: III; The Bessarabian guberniia] (Izдание Tsentral'nogo Statisticheskogo Komiteta MVD: St. Petersburg, 1905). Cited in Dinu Poștarencu, *O istorie a Basarabiei în date și documente, 1812–1940* [A chronological and documentary history of Bessarabia] (Chișinău: Cartier, 1998), 123–26. The ethnic statistics, however, are only approximate since the only criterion related to ethnicity was native language. Needless to say, this did not necessarily fit a person’s self-identification.

⁹⁵ Poștarencu, *O istorie a Basarabiei în date și documente, 1812–1940*, 126.

educational district in 1868 following an inspection of Bessarabian schools stated that, according to official statistics, there were 358 village parish schools (with 4,178 pupils) on January 1, 1868. However, many of these institutions were not functional. The author of the report found that only 212 schools (with 2,515 pupils) were operating at the local level.⁹⁶ Though the educational reforms promoted by Count D. A. Tolstoi and his successors in the 1870s and 1880s somewhat improved the situation—so that by 1883 all Bessarabian educational institutions incorporated 32,543 pupils, and by 1901, 92,654 pupils were distributed among 1,513 schools at all levels—the penetration of the government's educational policies in rural areas remained rather shallow.⁹⁷ This did not escape the attention of local officials who increasingly viewed the school system as the most appropriate means to achieve the gradual acculturation (and eventual assimilation) of local inhabitants.

As in most other fields, Bessarabia occupied an intermediate position between the Western Borderlands claimed for the ideal Russian core and the “alien” (*inorodcheskie*) peripheries where a subtler policy of integration was necessary. The most daunting problem for the authorities in Bessarabia was linked to the linguistic predicament that blocked most attempts at Russifying schools. Imperial authorities' language policies aimed at gradually restricting and eventually eliminating Romanian from the public sphere. Although limitations on the use of the local idiom were introduced already in the late 1820s and legally enforced in 1834, Romanian-language education continued intermittently at a number of Bessarabian schools until the 1860s. One could reasonably assume that prevailing views within Russian official circles after the 1863–64 Polish revolt prompted the abolition of Romanian from educational institutions. These restrictions were imposed in two stages. Initially, Alexander II accepted the proposal of the State Council to prohibit the teaching of Romanian at the Kishinev Lyceum (this act was introduced on February 9, 1866). Five years later, when similar repressive measures were undertaken in other western provinces of the empire, a total ban on the teaching of Romanian in Bessarabian schools was approved on February 23, 1871.

This measure was emulated by the local Orthodox Church hierarchy, which demanded the use of Russian in drafting official Church documents in 1872. One should note, however, that the publication of books in Romanian was never officially prohibited. In fact, the Kishinev Theological Seminary's printing press, which issued religious literature in Romanian, was only closed in 1883, and it reopened in October 1906. Limited circulation of Romanian-language popular literature was also permitted. There

⁹⁶ Negru, *Țărismul și mișcarea națională a românilor din Basarabia*, 23.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 25, 35.

were several reasons for this relative leniency toward Bessarabia. First, the authorities focused their attention mostly on potentially subversive publications and turned a blind eye to politically neutral ones. Second, they perceived the potential impact of such writings as minimal given the low literacy of the target audience. Third, imperial officials never devised a comprehensive strategy of managing the peripheries and thus reacted, in this case as in others (the most notorious being the Ukrainian and the Lithuanian cases), on a mostly ad hoc basis. The perception of an irredentist threat existed in the minds of imperial bureaucrats, but it was not serious enough to warrant more radical measures. Finally, the imagined affinity of the Orthodox peasant population to the core of the ethnic hierarchy within the empire led to the application of a more restrained policy that based its presumed effectiveness on the gradual disappearance of local ethnic and linguistic peculiarities under the pressure of imperial integrative mechanisms.⁹⁸

Though one cannot accept the views of nationalist Romanian historiography, which postulated the existence of a concerted policy of Russification in the educational sphere from at least the mid-nineteenth century onward (if not starting from 1812), it appears that after the 1880s, along with the incipient discursive nationalization of the empire, more systematic efforts in this direction were attempted.⁹⁹ However, these projects were never fully implemented, and the school system remained chronically underdeveloped up until World War I. The failure of mass acculturation was due not only to bureaucratic inefficiency, but also to Russian officials' ambivalent atti-

⁹⁸ For an opposing argument claiming that the Russian authorities implemented a well-devised scheme of assimilation and linguistic Russification and also aimed to create a separate Moldavian language and nation, see Lidia Colesnic-Codreanca, *Limba română în Basarabia (1812–1918): Studiu socio-lingvistic pe baza materialelor de arhivă* [The Romanian language in Bessarabia, 1812–1918: A socio-linguistic study based on archival materials] (Chișinău: Museum, 2003). I find the author's argument unconvincing.

⁹⁹ For example, the Council of Ministers discussed the Bessarabian situation in two separate meetings on March 7 and 21, 1889. The participants generally agreed on the need to extend "Russian education" in the province "gradually and without constraining the local alien population." The best means to do so were the Russian-language parish schools, which had to be opened in most villages. Special attention was given to Russian-language instruction for the local clergy, which was to serve as the main agent of this "cultural policy." The public state schools also had an important role to play. However, they recognized that a number of "unfavorable conditions" persisted in Bessarabia, the most important among them being the "lack of understanding for the necessity of learning Russian" and the poor knowledge of Russian among the local clergy. See Negru, *Țarismul și mișcarea națională a românilor din Basarabia*, 34–35.

tude toward popular education. The Bessarabian Romanian population's identification with the Russian Orthodox Church also precluded an "Il'minskii-style" project of native-language education, though the reopening of the Romanian-language press by Bishop Vladimir in 1906 and the authorized publication of the ecclesiastical journal *Luminătorul* starting in January 1907 pointed to such a possibility.¹⁰⁰ However, the mainstream policy of the Russian Orthodox hierarchy consisted of integrating the local clergy into centrally controlled structures, which implied the rejection of any local initiatives. This tendency culminated in the authoritarian administration of Bishop Serafim Chichagov (1908–14), who tried (unsuccessfully) to reverse the emerging pattern of liberalization within the Church and also attempted to enlist the Bessarabian clergy into contemporary nationalist politics through his direct involvement in the activities of the "Union of the Russian People."¹⁰¹

Secondary educational institutions in Bessarabia were not able to provide a suitable platform for the emergence of a modern public sphere. The first institution of secondary education in the region was the Kishinev Theological Seminary, established in January 1813. Despite the early opening of a number of small private schools followed by the partially successful application of the "Lancasterian model" starting in the 1820s, a significant extension of the public system of secondary education only occurred in the 1830s when the first lyceum in Kishinev was inaugurated in September 1833. The expansion of secondary education continued with the opening of a second lyceum, which was initially a gymnasium inaugurated in September 1871 and later transformed into a full-fledged secondary school in 1884. By 1914, the network of district, city, and higher secondary schools improved in Kishinev and other important cities of the province. This was supplemented by the expansion of technical education in the early twentieth century.

Local educated society displayed the first signs of self-organization in the last years of the nineteenth century. Thus, the *guberniia* authorities sponsored the formation of the Bessarabian Provincial Scholarly Archival Commission, which was the first local institution that documented the region's history and cultural heritage.¹⁰² Another significant initiative supported by the clergy in cooperation with the emerging intellectual class was the creation of the Historical-Archeological Church Society of Bessarabia

¹⁰⁰ Poștarencu, *O istorie a Basarabiei în date și documente*, 134–36.

¹⁰¹ Nicolae Popovschi, *Istoria bisericii din Basarabia în veacul al XIX-lea sub ruși* [A history of the Bessarabian Church in the nineteenth century under Russian rule] (Chișinău: Museum, 2000), 301–4.

¹⁰² Previously, a center for such activities was established by the Odessa Historical and Antiquarian Society.

in April 1904. Finally, in the context of the revolutionary crisis of 1905 and due to the new avenues opened for public activity, a group of conservative Romanian-speaking landowners and officials founded the Moldavian Society for the Spread of National Culture in September 1905. Under the leadership of Pavel Dicescul, a prominent local activist and a marshal of the nobility of the Kishinev district, this organization championed the rather moderate agenda of cultural enlightenment aimed at the Romanian-speaking peasantry, while emphasizing its loyalty to the dynasty and the imperial order. The scope of these early twentieth-century efforts was rather modest and affected only a minority of Bessarabia's intelligentsia.

A quantitative and qualitative shift in the political mobilization of local intellectuals gradually occurred after 1898 when Russian universities were opened to aspiring local youths. In previous years, the chances of receiving a higher education were rather limited for Bessarabians. The absence of a university in the province, the elitist character of higher education (open mostly to scions of prominent noble or merchant families), and the relatively poor quality of most local educational institutions discouraged a mass influx of Bessarabian-born youths into Russian universities. After 1900, however, the first groups of Bessarabian students formed a number of "national associations" (*zemliachestva*), the most notorious being the semi-conspiratorial circle at Dorpat University, which produced several important figures of the early twentieth-century opposition movement. Similar organizations emerged in more important university centers such as St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Kiev. Despite these incipient developments, only the shock of the 1905 Revolution would polarize political opinion and weaken the traditional clientelism that structured the distribution of power at the local level in Bessarabia.

Another fundamental factor that hampered the earlier development of a public sphere for an identity contest in the province was the weakness of the local press. If one acknowledges the central role of the press and journalism in state building, national education, and the articulation of discourses of collective identity, the absence of developed media might explain the lack of articulation that was so conspicuous in the Bessarabian case. For most of the nineteenth century, the only periodical published in Bessarabia was the official bulletin *Bessarabskie oblastnye* (from 1873—*gubernskie*) *vedomosti*—published since July 1854 by the provincial administration. This was supplemented by the Orthodox Church bulletin *Kishinevskie eparkhial'nye vedomosti*, which was issued from 1867 onward and featured a Romanian-language edition until 1871. Several abortive attempts to launch other Romanian-language publications were undertaken, but to no avail.

On the one hand, the authorities were reluctant to allow such enterprises due to concerns about political reliability; indeed, the Bessarabians'

dubious loyalty and the consolidation of the Romanian nation-state became pressing issues for Russian bureaucrats. On the other hand, there was clearly a lack of demand at the local level for a Russian-language press. Since overtly political factors were absent, the reason for this lack of demand was most likely the small reading public in the region and the limited number of potential consumers. Another reason was the conservatism of local educated society, which reinforced traditional models of social behavior and did not foster an environment for public debate. In any case, the first privately owned paper (*Bessarabskii vestnik*) only appeared in September 1889. By the early twentieth century, the local press underwent a process of consolidation and ideological clarification. As a result, two broad orientations that might be loosely termed “liberal” and “conservative-monarchist” crystallized in the Bessarabian press by 1903. The first tendency was mainly represented by the influential newspaper *Bessarabskaia zhizn'* issued between 1903 and 1918, initially under the editorship of Alexis Nour, who later moved to Romania and played a significant role in the polemics over Bessarabia.

The second trend was epitomized by the notorious publication *Bessarabets* (printed since 1897) coordinated by the radical and anti-Semitic publicist Pavel Krushevan, who was descendant of a prominent Bessarabian noble family. Krushevan's astute journalism and extreme political views, coupled with his talent as a writer, contributed to a marked shift in the role of the local press, which by the first years of the twentieth century began to exercise a growing influence on the emerging public sphere of the province.¹⁰³ Despite these changes evidenced by the accusations leveled at Krushevan's paper for inciting the population to commit the 1903 pogrom, the 1905 revolutionary crisis represented the turning point for the transfer of Bessarabia's contested character to the local public sphere. The emergence of the first short-lived Romanian-language publications forced the authorities to reconsider using the written word for propaganda purposes among the Bessarabian populace. The government's mainly reactive policy assumed a more coherent form during the 1912 anniversary of the province's annexation. However, even in this case it is difficult to speak of a full-fledged integrative vision that responded to local signals. Not only was the inarticulate peasantry passive, but so too were the intellectuals within

¹⁰³ For a comprehensive overview of the Bessarabian press before 1917, see B. A. Trubetskoi, *Iz istorii periodicheskoi pechati Bessarabii, 1854–1916 gg.* [From the history of Bessarabia's periodical press, 1854–1916] (Kishinev: Știința, 1989). A recent study focusing on the Romanian-language press in the revolutionary and wartime contexts is Silvia Grossu, *Presa din Basarabia în contextul sociocultural al anilor 1906–1944* [The Bessarabian press in the socio-cultural context of the years 1906–1944] (Chișinău: Tehnica-Info, 2003).

the *guberniia* quite reluctant to construct a hypothetical local perspective on their province's place within the empire. Thus, Bessarabia remained essentially an *object* of rival state-building projects.¹⁰⁴

The delay in the political mobilization of ethnicity in Bessarabia must be attributed to a whole series of factors. The predominantly rural character of the population and the persistence of a "deference society" in the villages contributed to the peasantry's reluctance to respond to the various stimuli of impending modernity. The educational policies of the government blocked the emergence of an articulate, local intellectual stratum for most of the nineteenth century. When such groups began to coalesce, their formative environments were Russian universities, which, by the end of the imperial period, were hotbeds of opposition and were deemed notoriously unreliable and even pernicious. Indeed, the Bessarabian-born minister of education, Leon Kasso, confronted one of the most serious university crises before World War I. Educated Bessarabian youths followed the Russian intelligentsia's lead in its dealings with and attitudes toward the regime. The weakness of local institutions and the lack of an adequate framework for social initiatives led to the rather late and partial formation of a public sphere capable of sustaining systematic intellectual activity at the local level. Thus, official discourse supplanted non-existent local voices in the symbolic competition over the region.

Politically, the masses remained unresponsive to the mobilizing strategies of imperial and nationalizing agents who attempted to obtain their loyalty. The traditional criteria of religious belonging and a loose sense of attachment to the imperial dynasty were much more likely to elicit a response from the peasantry than any invocation of ethnic solidarity with a nebulous ideal fatherland beyond the Prut. This was demonstrated by the voting pattern in the Duma elections and especially by the prominence of right-wing monarchist organizations in Bessarabia.

However, it would be equally problematic to insist on the complete passivity of a static, traditional society that remained unaffected by the social and ideological changes of the early twentieth century. Changes gradually became apparent once the ideological differences between the small groups of the politically conscious local intelligentsia emerged during World War I and the revolutionary turmoil of 1917. The tension between the social and national aspects of the "Bessarabian question" structured the region's public sphere in 1917–18 when mass politics finally had a direct impact on

¹⁰⁴ The factual and statistical references in this account are drawn from the following works: Ion Nistor, *Istoria Basarabiei* [The history of Bessarabia] (Chişinău: Cartea Moldovenească, 1991); Poştarencu, *O istorie a Basarabiei în date şi documente, 1812–1940*; and Negru, *Țarismul şi mişcarea naţională a românilor din Basarabia*.

local developments. More importantly, this tension affected the terms of Bessarabia's integration into the Romanian Kingdom and created an atmosphere of mutual suspicion that was not attenuated during the interwar period. The dilemmas of Romanian nation-building in Bessarabia between 1918 and 1940 are, however, another (albeit related) story. To summarize, the region between the Prut and the Dniester was rhetorically constructed as a contested territory between the 1860s and 1914. In many ways, this discursive construction preceded the actual impact of modern ideologies and social processes in the area, and it also paved the way for them. Bessarabia, like any other territory, was the product of the complex interplay between discourse and reality.

CHAPTER II

Southern Bessarabia as an Imperial Borderland: Diplomatic and Political Dilemmas

The Russian-Romanian 1878 Controversy: Between Realpolitik and National Dignity

The emergence of the Romanian nation-state in 1862 did not significantly alter imperial Russia's official stance or policy toward the remote Bessarabian borderland. During the 1860s the provincial bureaucracy rarely dwelled on the potential challenge of the Romanian project. The local police's occasional reports, purportedly identifying a certain "Romanian" party composed of a handful of young nobles, emphasized the "platonic" nature of their national sentiments and pointed to the ultimate loyalty of even these presumably dangerous elements that required police surveillance.¹ Moreover, the Russian administration's concerns were linked primarily to the political turmoil provoked within the empire by the Polish Revolt of 1863. It is hardly surprising to find the "Polish intrigue" among the possible catalysts of the fledgling Bessarabian national movement that remained in an embryonic stage for the rest of the nineteenth century. Even the most insecure imperial officials did not view the newly united Romanian Principalities as a future Piedmont for the Romanians of Bessarabia. Isolated incidents akin to the one involving Alexandru Hâjdeu—an eccentric and learned landowner from the Hotin district who was elected as a founding member of the Romanian Academic Society (soon to become the Romanian Academy) in 1866 and whose attempt to emigrate to Romania was eventually blocked by the governor P. A. Antonovich (producing a rather extensive and interesting correspondence in the process)—are but additional proof of the conspicuous absence of any internal challenge to the imperial regime even within the ranks of potentially rebellious groups.² The

¹ ANRM, fond 2, op. 1, d. 7573, ff. 65–66 verso. Cited in Negru, *Țarismul și mișcarea națională a românilor din Basarabia*, 125.

² Liviu Marian, *Alexandru Hâjdeu și Academia Română: după dosarul secret Nr. 41 din 1867 al Guvernatorului Basarabiei, cu 24 documente* [Alexandru Hâjdeu and the

lack of articulation that characterized the local Romanian-speaking intellectuals' position up to the revolution of 1905–7 invalidates any claim about the existence of a national movement in the province in the second half of the nineteenth century. The contested character of the region did not result in the formation of two coherent and continuous narratives that spanned the whole pre-World War I period. Rather, one can speak about certain moments of heightened discursive tension that corresponded to a closer entanglement of the Russian and Romanian polities in the international politics of the era. While real events determined the motives and dynamics of these nodal points of symbolic competition, the internal evolution and the disproportionate rhetorical investments that accompanied their development originated in the different criteria for political legitimacy in the two states, as well as in their otherwise unstated, mutual grievances.

The problem of Bessarabia first emerged on the map of Russian-Romanian relations at a crucial juncture of the “Eastern Question” during the Russian-Ottoman War of 1877–78. This moment marked the Romanian government's elaboration of its official position concerning the inclusion of Southern Bessarabia in the “national body” and provoked the reaction of Russian official and semi-official circles, which developed a series of counter-arguments in response to the Romanian stance. However, this acute stage of the Russian-Romanian controversy was also paradoxical and uncharacteristic in many respects. First, the object of the argument was curiously metonymic in the sense that it could not be integrated easily into the Romanian national narrative due to both ethnographic and historical circumstances. Aside from a rather narrow line of settlements along the Prut, the Romanians represented a minority of the local population and thus could not be regarded as the only indigenous inhabitants of the area. Moreover, this territory had been directly administered by the Ottoman Empire for almost three centuries before being annexed by Russia in 1812. To make matters even more complicated for the Romanian nation-building project, this region also became the center of state-sponsored colonization in the first decades of the nineteenth century. The three Southern Bessarabian districts of Cahul, Bolgrad, and Ismail that constituted the disputed territory were awarded to the Moldavian Principality in 1856 according to the Treaty of Paris that affirmed Russia's defeat in the Crimean War. Article Twenty of this act explicitly stipulated that the “rectification” of the frontier in Bessarabia was accepted “in order to secure in the future the freedom of navigation on the Danube.” The primacy of the strategic element generated an interesting two-pronged “argumentative displacement” that accompanied the traditional, historically inspired arguments that sup-

Romanian Academy: According to the secret file Nr. 41 from 1867 of the Bessarabian governor, with 24 documents] (Bucharest, 1932), 24 pp.

ported the official Romanian view. On the one hand, the three southern Bessarabian districts were conflated under the generic name of “Bessarabia” to include the rest of the province remaining under Russian domination. This deliberate omission allowed the Romanian polemicists to use the traditional claim of historical sovereignty even in the case of a territory to which it could be applied only tenuously. On the other hand, the displacement manifested itself through the insistence on the economic, strategic, and legal aspects of the problem. This strategy was explicitly aimed at an international audience that had to be impressed by the invocation of an all-European interest in the region of the Lower Danube that Romania was presumably best suited to uphold.

The arguments employed by Romanian officials and publicists differed according to the target audience and the institutions that developed them. Thus, the mainly legalistic and “interest-based” arguments of Romanian discourse can be partly explained by its official nature. The Romanian position was developed in various diplomatic papers, including telegrams, circular notes to the country’s foreign agents, and lengthy memoranda to the same diplomats or to Russian officials, from the Russian agent in Bucharest to A. M. Gorchakov in St. Petersburg. The bulk of these documents emanated from the Chancellery of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, then led by Mihail Kogălniceanu, one of the most prominent intellectuals of the 1848 generation.

However, this official moderate line of the “Bessarabia campaign” promoted by M. Kogălniceanu, and, more ambiguously, by the Liberal Prime Minister I. C. Brătianu, was challenged vigorously from at least two directions. The first was the internal opposition within the Liberal government led by Dimitrie A. Sturdza, a rising political figure who waged a relentless anti-Russian campaign during and after the war both in the press and especially in his frequent parliamentary speeches. The second, more virulent campaign stemmed from the circles of the Conservative opposition and reached a crescendo in a series of articles by Mihai Eminescu published in the official organ of the Conservative Party: the *Timpu* newspaper. Eminescu’s case is especially important due to the openly nationalist rhetoric that consecrated him as one of the most original and radical thinkers of pre-1914 Romania. These aspects of Eminescu’s ideology will be addressed in detail in the following discussion.

Two important points should be emphasized at the outset, however. First, it is impossible to speak of a unified Romanian stance on Bessarabia at the time of the 1878 controversy. Besides representing a transitional phase in the appearance and development of the Bessarabian theme within the Romanian national narrative, this controversy was exploited in different ways by the various circles *within* the Romanian political and intellectual establishment competing for its appropriation. Though these differences

are of secondary importance to my argument—indeed, I would suggest that they are differences of degree rather than kind—such nuances cannot be ignored. Second, the 1878 diplomatic conflict had far-reaching consequences at the practical-political level. While in the intellectual realm it only reinforced preexisting anti-Russian tendencies, which were a feature of the 1848 generation as a whole, the events accompanying the Russian-Romanian settlement of 1878 heralded the new policy of diplomatic alliances pursued by the Brătianu government that culminated in Romania's treaty with Germany and Austria-Hungary in 1883 that confirmed its entry into the Triple Alliance. Though the "Bessarabian question" entered the shadows of Romanian diplomacy after 1878, its sudden reemergence during World War I cannot be explained only by the irredentist logic of a nation-state's foreign policy, but must also take into account the previous experience of symbolic competition. The following argument will focus on two distinct but interrelated topics. First, I examine the polemics between the Romanian and Russian authorities concerning the validity of their mutually exclusive claims to the territory of Southern Bessarabia. The second track of discussion explores the specifically Romanian context of the 1878 debate and, more narrowly, compares the relative value of Southern Bessarabia and Dobrogea for the Romanian national project both from a material and a symbolic point of view.

A succinct pre-history of Russian-Romanian negotiations leading to Romania's material and military cooperation with Russian forces during the 1877–78 Russian-Ottoman War is necessary in order to contextualize the Romanian government's counter-arguments in the diplomatic struggle for Southern Bessarabia. Two stages of this intense diplomatic activity are worth emphasizing here. The first concerns the preliminary talks held between the Romanian Prime Minister I. C. Brătianu and the Russian Foreign Minister A. M. Gorchakov during the visit of a Romanian delegation to the tsar's Crimean residence at Livadia in the autumn of 1876. During this preliminary stage of the negotiations, the "Bessarabian question" was among the most sensitive issues in Russian-Romanian relations. Mutual interest in a future anti-Ottoman alliance precluded any open discussion of the matter and left ample space for all kinds of interpretations that crystallized into two opposing sets of arguments in later historiography. For writers defending the Russophile position, it seemed clear that "at least a beginning of a deal in this respect [regarding the retrocession of the Bessarabian districts in exchange for appropriate territorial compensation] was reached between the Romanian and Russian governments."³ Thus, the

³ Constantin Calmuschi, *Relațiunile politice ale Țărilor Române cu Rusia* [The political relations of the Romanian Principalities with Russia] (Galați: Tipografia Buciumul Român, 1911), 278.

subsequent rhetorical battle between Russian and Romanian officials appears to have been either dissimulation on the part of the Romanian government to deceive its own public (that was apprehensive about a Russian-Romanian alliance) or a calculated strategy employed in order to gain greater territorial concessions at the peace conference by manipulating the competing interests of the Great Powers on the Lower Danube. A second view, supported by most Romanian publicists and national historians, blamed the Russian government for using the same strategy of dissimulation, while predictably insisting on the common myth of Russian expansionism that served as a privileged, (pseudo-)explanatory tool for the complex interplay of political considerations that actually determined the dynamics of Russian-Romanian relations in this period.⁴ Closer scrutiny of contemporaneous sources reveals that the Romanian government, while clearly aware of Russian claims on Southern Bessarabia, decided to suspend the “Bessarabian question” until the end of the war in hopes of striking an advantageous bargain afterwards. The ambiguous position of St. Petersburg, careful to assuage the concerns of a potentially useful ally and eager to secure its military communication lines in Romania for the duration of the military campaign, only raised hopes for an ultimate compromise on the matter. These considerations transpired during the second stage of Romanian-Russian negotiations that culminated in the signing of a military convention regulating the status and passage of Russian troops through Romania.

⁴ For a somewhat more balanced account along these lines, see G. I. Brătianu, *Le problème des frontières russo-roumaines pendant la guerre de 1877–1878 et au Congrès de Berlin* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1928), esp. 39–49. Heavily influenced by the contemporary Soviet-Romanian dispute over Bessarabia and directly engaged in polemics with Christian Racovski on this subject, Brătianu concludes that “dans cet affaire, la diplomatie imperiale a manqué non seulement de franchise, mais aussi de suite et d’unité dans ses vues,” 49. For a classic contemporary account of the 1877–78 controversy as a case of Russian expansionism, see A. D. Xenopol, “The War of 1877, The Peace of Berlin, 1878,” in *Războaiele dintre Ruși și Turci și înrăurirea lor asupra Țărilor Române* [The Russian-Turkish wars and their influence on the Romanian lands] (Bucharest: Albatros, 1997), 326–69. The author’s conclusion is characteristic: “. . . the Russians have but one aim with regard to the Romanians: to wipe their name from the face of the earth as soon as possible. As protectors, as allies they have dispossessed us; what more could they do as enemies? Therefore, an alliance with the Russians in any circumstance . . . will always be a costly folly.” [original edition, 1880]. A contemporary account following the same basic line of argumentation and lacking any trace of critical analysis is Dumitru P. Ionescu, *Războiul de Independență a României și problema Basarabiei* [Romania’s war of independence and the Bessarabian problem] (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2000).

On the one hand, the Liberal government sought to acquire an explicit, legally binding guarantee of Romania's territorial integrity in the text of the convention that would eliminate any basis for future Russian territorial demands. This insistence on legalistic aspects led to excessive delays in the negotiations, which dragged on from November 1876 until early April 1877. Despite the Russian government's interest in the swift ratification of the document (confirmed by the secret mission of the head of the diplomatic chancellery of the Russian General Staff, A. I. Nelidov, who was sent to Bucharest on November 15, 1876),⁵ the Romanians pursued their rather cautious approach. This prompted A. M. Gorchakov to write to the Russian agent in Bucharest, Baron D. I. Stuart (who was left in charge of the negotiations after Nelidov's departure), instructing him not to insist on immediately signing the convention and to "leave Brătianu to his own thoughts."⁶ After several months of further delays and explanations by the highest Russian military officials concerning the goals and prospective results of the future war,⁷ the military convention was finally concluded on April 4/16, 1877, barely a week before the outbreak of the war. The most important provisions regarding Romania's legal and political status during the period of the military campaign were contained in Article Two, which stipulated: "In order to avoid any inconvenience or danger for Romania during the passage of Russian troops through its territory, the Government of H. M. the Emperor of All the Russias takes it upon itself to maintain and effectively respect the political rights of the Romanian State in accordance with internal laws and existing treaties, as well as to maintain and defend the present integrity of Romania [*l'intégrité actuelle de la Roumanie*]."⁸ This clause, introduced at the behest of the Romanian government in the last stage of the negotiation process and initially resisted by Russian officials, would prove to be the cornerstone of the Romanian position both in later protests addressed to the Russian authorities and in the presentation of grievances at the Berlin Congress in June 1878. Though Russian diplomats would later dismiss this legal argument by using similar legal motivations

⁵ Brătianu, *Le problème des frontières russo-roumaines*, 12.

⁶ V. N. Vinogradov, M. D. Ereshchenko, L. E. Semyonova, and T. A. Pokivailova, eds., *Bessarabiia na perekrestke evropeiskoi diplomatii. Dokumenty i materialy* [Bessarabia at the crossroads of European diplomacy: Documents and materials] (Moscow: Indrik, 1996), 144.

⁷ Ibid. In a letter from Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich to the Romanian Prince Charles I, the Grand Duke asserted: "This aim [of the war] leaves out any idea of conquest, annexation or warlike ambitions and can be reduced to the holy duty of protecting the oppressed from the oppressors, the restoration of our co-faithful brothers of the Orient to their legal rights" (dated January 12 (24), 1877).

⁸ *Conventions conclues entre la Russie et la Roumanie le 4/16 avril 1877*, Edition officielle (Bucharest: Imprimerie de l'Etat, 1877), 3–4.

(e.g., by invoking the validity of the convention only for the duration of military operations or by arguing that this guarantee was only effective against Ottoman or Austrian troops' violations of Romanian territory), one can assume that the clause in question was intended not so much for its Russian signatories, but mainly for the diplomats of the Great Powers that presumably appreciated the salience of the principle of territorial sovereignty. The wider implications of the provision are demonstrated by the stance of the Romanian delegation at the Berlin Congress when it used the text of the convention as the main material proof of its claims to the Southern Bessarabian districts.

On the other hand, however, Romanian leaders were fully aware that Russia's victory would almost certainly invalidate the provisions of the Treaty of Paris (1856) and thus endanger the Romanian position in Southern Bessarabia. Although it has been argued that the Romanian government was divided between the moderate approach pursued by Kogălniceanu and the more intransigent position held by Ion C. Brătianu,⁹ such a conclusion is hardly supported by Russian sources. In fact, it appears that both Romanian officials adopted the strategy of suspension. Thus, in his report to St. Petersburg about a conversation he held with the Romanian prime minister more than one month before the signing of the convention, the Russian consul D. I. Stuart writes: "He [Brătianu] confesses that the trip to Livadia convinced him completely that Bessarabia from now on is lost for Romania, and that Russia will not miss the occasion to take back this small slice of land, which is so necessary to it, at the first opportunity."¹⁰ The Russian diplomat reported that Brătianu said that "all . . . Romanians who have common sense understand full well the inevitable necessity of liquidating the anomalies created by the Treaty of Paris, but it is hard for them to acquiesce to the irredeemable loss of a territory that they perceived as rightfully belonging to them."¹¹ After invoking Brătianu's purported admission of the primacy of realpolitik over arguments inspired by historical rights, Stuart concluded that "the Romanian government, prepared to give up Bessarabia, is secretly harboring the hope to receive from Russia's magnanimity a compensation in the eventuality of being forced to cede a part of its territory to the advantage of its mighty neighbor."¹² Following the same logic of future territorial compensation, A. I. Nelidov devised a project (elaborated immediately before the outbreak of hostilities) arguing that the most appropriate solution would be to grant Romania the Danube Delta and a portion of the "territory between the

⁹ For this argument, see Brătianu, *Le problème des frontières russo-roumaines*, 20.

¹⁰ Vinogradov et al., *Bessarabiia na perekrestke*, 146.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 146–47.

Danube, Serbia, and the course of the Lom River with the fortress of Vidin" instead of Dobrogea.¹³ The latter province had to become a part of the future Bulgarian Principality, since "for strategic reasons it would be desirable" for Russia to "preserve a direct line of communication with Bulgaria, so as not to be forced in the future—in the case of a new campaign beyond the Danube—to pass through the territory of Romania, which will become independent and possibly ill-disposed toward us."¹⁴ Romania's entry into the war was also partly motivated by the aim of reaching a territorial compromise with the Russian Empire. Unsurprisingly, both Romanian officials and their Russian counterparts viewed Romania's participation in military operations as a negotiating tool for the future peace settlement. Some Russian diplomats noted the potential difficulties that Romanian military cooperation would entail for the projected territorial exchange as early as April 1877 when Nelidov stated that "Romania's cooperation [in the war] did not occur due to our efforts and at our behest."¹⁵ Though later developments caused the Russian military to reconsider the usefulness of Romanian assistance, Bucharest viewed its military involvement not only as an affirmation of the country's independence (proclaimed on May 10/22, 1877), but also as an additional argument in its potential frontier dispute with the Russian Empire. Thus, in an instruction sent to the Romanian diplomatic agent in Vienna during the war in November 1877, Kogălniceanu openly asserted that "the obligation to rescue this part of our country [Southern Bessarabia] was, to a great extent, the reason for the cooperation of our army at Plevna. *We gave our blood in order not to give up our land*" (emphasis in original).¹⁶ This invocation of the organic link between the "redeeming blood" of the Romanian soldiers and the territory that had to be secured for the national body reveals the complex relationship between the exalted rhetoric of Romanian diplomacy and the impact of realpolitik that it obscured.

The "Bessarabian question" did not effectively reemerge as the main contentious issue between the two governments until the successful completion of the anti-Ottoman campaign in the winter of 1877–78. Occasional references to a future "compromise" hinted at the salience of this matter for Russian officials, as evidenced by the conversation between the Romanian prince and Gorchakov in Ploiești in June 1877.¹⁷ The Romanian

¹³ Ibid., 149.

¹⁴ Ibid., 148.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ N. Iorga, *Războiul pentru independența României: acțiuni diplomatice și stări de spirit* [The war for Romania's independence: Diplomatic actions and the state of the public spirit] (Bucharest: Albatros, 1998), 169–70.

¹⁷ Brătianu, *Le problème des frontières russo-roumaines*, 18–19.

foreign minister articulated his concerns regarding this issue during his trip to Vienna in the summer of the same year.¹⁸ However, the official position of the Russian government was only revealed in a letter written by the Russian chancellor to the Romanian foreign minister in the early days of 1878 and dispatched to Bucharest by General N. P. Ignatiev, who was passing through Romania on his way to the headquarters of the Russian High Command in the Balkans as a plenipotentiary for the armistice with the Ottomans. Referring to the suspension tactics of the Romanian government, Gorchakov asserted that “the Emperor has judged this moment appropriate for clarifying certain questions that I was already in the position to discuss with Your Excellency in general terms in view of the future peace.”¹⁹ While emphasizing his desire to avoid any “misunderstanding,” the chancellor forcefully stated the Russian position in the following terms: “We also have interests and rights to safeguard, which we cannot subject to any kind of bargain [*sur lesquels nous ne pouvons pas transiger*].”²⁰ The Russian Empire’s active involvement in the Eastern Question and its former protectorate over the Principalities were also invoked as the basis for a special relationship between the two countries²¹ that could, however, be established only by the Romanian leadership’s adoption of a realpolitik approach. This equivocal language was meant, on the one hand, to pave the way for N. P. Ignatiev’s mission to Bucharest (he was officially instructed to clarify the position of the Russian government during his meetings there) and, on the other hand, to preempt the active opposition of Romanian officials.

The diplomatic conflict that was fermenting for several months due to both governments’ interest in muting their grievances during the war sud-

¹⁸ Ibid., 19. During his conversations with I. Bălăceanu, the Romanian diplomatic agent in Vienna, Kogălniceanu made an interesting comparison between the situation of Romania in 1877 and that of Piedmont in 1859, referring to the cession of Nice and Savoy to France. Bălăceanu, who did not share Kogălniceanu’s skepticism at the time, commented that such a comparison was inappropriate since “Russia was not France, Alexander II was not Napoleon III, Romania was not Piedmont, and, above all, Kogălniceanu was not Cavour.” Below this superficial rhetoric, the parallel between Bessarabia and Nice/Savoy reveals the extent to which this region was integrated into the image of an ideal fatherland.

¹⁹ *Congrès de Berlin. Actes et discours des Plénipotentiaires de S. A. le Prince de Roumanie* (Bucharest: Imprimerie Officielle, 1878), 12.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ The Russian foreign minister reminded his Romanian counterpart about the “traditions that connected Romania to Russia” and attempted to defend Russia’s moral high ground by emphasizing that “your country owes its entire past to [these connections] and I think that it will equally find [in Russia] its most solid support in the future,” *ibid.*

denly erupted on January 14/26, 1878, when Romanian diplomatic agents in Paris and St. Petersburg informed Kogălniceanu about the formal Russian claims concerning the retrocession of Southern Bessarabia. The implicit clash of national and imperial discourses crystallized in a coherent set of arguments and counter-arguments that framed the symbolic competition over the region in the following months. In a telegram sent from the French capital, the Romanian agent there reported a conversation with the Russian Ambassador, Prince Orlov, who, while maintaining a cautious tone, declared that he “believed in the probability of such a demand” [the reclamation of Southern Bessarabia] on the following grounds: “That there are, in Ismail and its environs, memories and monuments of glorious fights that are dear to the hearts of every Russian; that he recalls that at the Congress of Paris this cession cost [the Russians] more than the destruction of the fleet; that he knows that the Emperor Alexander personally attaches great importance to this question, and that this [issue] has perhaps been one of the determining causes of the war.”²² Thus, an emphasis on strategic considerations and powerful invocations of past and present military exploits, coupled with the restoration of the monarch’s honor—a recurring motif that points to the importance of the tsar’s “conqueror” image for his domestic legitimacy—represented a defense of empire somewhat uncharacteristic for diplomatic parlance. Combining a moral and legalistic stance, the Romanian agent responded by stressing the “serious moral considerations that link us to this part of our heritage [*patrimoine*]” and the “painful sacrifice” that the loss of the territory entailed for the nation, while also pointing to the “unsparing” efforts of the Romanian army during the war and to the legal guarantee “contained in the April Convention.”²³ In stark contrast to his previous position, Orlov responded that “after all, this territory has no great importance” and assured his Romanian colleague that Romania would receive “large compensation” if it were ultimately deprived of Southern Bessarabia.²⁴ The national rhetoric of heritage and sacrifice clashed here with an imperial vision that curiously combined an utterly pragmatic attitude with musings on military prestige and honor that seemed better suited to a pre-modern polity than the ostensibly modern empire of Alexander II.

²² Telegram of N. Callimaki-Catargi to M. Kogălniceanu, Paris, January 14/26, 1878, in *Documente oficiale din Corespondința diplomatică de la 5 (17) octombrie 1877 până la 15 (27) septembrie 1878, prezentate corpurilor legiuitoare în sesiunea anului 1880–1881* [Official documents from the diplomatic correspondence issued from October 5/17, 1877 until September 15/27, 1878] (Bucharest: Imprimeria Oficială, 1881), 22.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

An even more revealing example of the discursive conundrum facing the two governments can be found in the telegram sent to Bucharest the same day by the Romanian agent in St. Petersburg, General Prince Ioan Gr. Ghica. Informing his minister about the “formal intention” of the tsar to “retake the part of Bessarabia until Kilia,” in exchange for which Romania would acquire “the Danube Delta and Dobrogea until Kustenge [Constanța],” the diplomat listed the arguments that the two highest-ranking officials of the empire invoked: “That this territory had been returned [*retrocédé*] to Moldavia and not to Romania; that it had been severed from Russia by a treaty of which there is nothing left at all; that it is not just Russia alone that should abide by the treaty to its own detriment [*détriement*]; and that this claim is for it [Russia] a question of national honor and national dignity [*d’honneur et de dignité nationales*].”²⁵ Though the difference in emphasis is striking if one compares the thrust of these essentially legal points with the previous document, the common theme of honor and dignity allows one to understand how such a lexicon influenced Russian leaders’ thinking and how it was linked to the self-legitimization of imperial elites.²⁶ The answer of the Romanian diplomat, if partly legalistic, was also framed in unambiguously national terms. Thus, Ghica’s summary of his own answer emphasized the “specious” (*spécieux*) nature of the argument that invoked the non-existence of the Romanian state at the time of the Treaty of Paris, as well as the “unconditional” character of the integration of Southern Bessarabia into Moldavia.

At the same time, Ghica argued before Alexander II and Gorchakov that “this territory is a strip of our own body [*un lambeau de notre corps*], a possession that is our right *ab antiquo*.”²⁷ This historical-organicist rhetoric of course failed to impress the Russian dignitaries who reiterated their “unalterable” (*inébranlable*) decision to pursue their declared course of action, adding that Russia would prefer to discuss this question directly with Romania instead of submitting it to a future peace conference.²⁸ The reaction of the Romanian foreign minister, if not a calculated maneuver designed to impress the Great Powers, represented not the diplomatic answer of a politician, but the emotional response of a national historian. Kogălniceanu said as much when he bluntly stated in his telegram to Ghica the next day

²⁵ Telegram of General I. Ghica to M. Kogălniceanu, St. Petersburg, January 14/26, 1878, in *Documente oficiale din Corespondința diplomatică*, 22.

²⁶ Though it is tempting to point to the possible influence of a nationalizing agenda and a deeper symbolic inclusion of Bessarabia into the Russian core, the French-language document probably refers in this case (while using the term “national”) to the Russian “state” (this substitution is customary in French).

²⁷ Telegram of General I. Ghica to M. Kogălniceanu, St. Petersburg, January 14/26, 1878, in *Documente oficiale din Corespondința diplomatică*, 22.

²⁸ Ibid.

that he was “so troubled by what your telegrams reveal” that he did not “feel capable of controlling [his] indignation.” In a series of exalted phrases, he downplayed his stature as a “public person” that entailed the use of “cold reason” and thus proclaimed: “For the moment, it is the Romanian alone who can speak.”²⁹ Accusing the Russian Empire of harboring the “desire to deprive the Romanians of a part of their heritage [*patri-moine*],” Kogălniceanu, while underlining the Russian authorities’ moral and legal obligations contained within the Convention of April 4, 1877, and in recognition of Romania’s military assistance, ultimately resorted to the rhetoric of victimization: “Thus, we have spilled our blood, we have exhausted our country, not in order to gain, not even in order to preserve [our territory], but in order to lose! Would it not have been better, then, to let the Turks emerge victorious? For they, certainly, in the case of victory, would not have taken Bessarabia from us!”³⁰ The historical component could not be omitted from this litany of grievances by a nation-builder who started his career as the editor of medieval Romanian chronicles and as the author of the first modern history of the Romanians published in 1837. Moreover, Kogălniceanu added an unexpected personal note in the following passage: “It is not the Minister who is talking to you at present . . . for the moment, it is the Romanian, the descendant of those who have protested, even under the Turkish yoke, against the annexation [*prise*] of Bukovina, against the annexation of Bessarabia!” The emotional tone of the dispatch culminated in the final phrase where Kogălniceanu’s tirade reached an almost prophetic intensity: “May God prove me wrong, but there are plenty of tempests to come in the wake of the annexation [*la prise*] of this strip of land [*lambeau de terre*] that they call Romanian Bessarabia.”³¹ It is not clear whether Kogălniceanu meant the diplomatic complications that could result from a clash of interests between the Great Powers on the Lower Danube, which the Romanian leadership hoped to exploit, or the future of Russian-Romanian relations.

The importance of these diplomatic sources lies in the framing of the Romanian arguments through national discourse, which likely considered public reactions as well as the need to offer symbolic resistance that would supersede the impact of realpolitik and the inequalities of international power that ultimately determined the outcome of this diplomatic struggle. Kogălniceanu’s apparent incoherence stems from the duality of Romanian discourse regarding Southern Bessarabia. While the national agenda was meant for internal consumption by Romanian political elites and the edu-

²⁹ Telegram of M. Kogălniceanu to Gen. I. Ghica, Bucharest, January 15/27, 1878, in *ibid.*, 23.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 23–24.

cated public, the legal arguments were crafted for the international arena where the Romanian government hoped to secure effective support. However, it is difficult to delineate the two spheres since the difference in emphasis indicated the prevailing stance at a particular moment.

The further exchange of telegrams between the Romanian foreign minister and the diplomatic agent in St. Petersburg reveals the same tension between the rhetoric of national dignity and the pragmatic dimension that prompted officials in Bucharest to invoke the legal grounds for their resistance to an amicable settlement. In a dispatch dated January 17/29, 1878, General Ghica informed his superior in Bucharest that during a conversation with the Russian chancellor he “again developed the moral and political considerations that could challenge a [Russian] claim” on Bessarabia,³² which included “Article Two of the [1877] Convention, the aim of our [military] cooperation, our rights of possession, and the interests of Russia not to lose the benevolent attitude [*les sympathies*] of Romania.”³³ This time, however, Gorchakov had no patience to elaborate on the Russian perspective, and so he dismissed the Romanian arguments as irrelevant, reaffirming the “unalterable” (*inébranlable*) character of the political decision regarding Southern Bessarabia and presenting the Romanian authorities with a “political necessity” that had to be treated accordingly.³⁴ Reverting to the previous language of diplomatic interest, he suggested that the Brătianu government convince Romanians that “the awarded territorial compensation far exceeds both in its size and its importance the loss of the reclaimed strip [*lambeau*].”³⁵ Here one encounters for the first time an open comparison between the two territories that constituted the objects of the territorial bargain.

Though other mutual recriminations followed—Gorchakov accused Bucharest of waging a diplomatic campaign against the Russian Empire and of instigating pro-government petitions in the disputed districts, while Kogălniceanu complained about the policies of the Russian military authorities in Romania—the “Bessarabian question” remained at the center of the dispute. Initially determined to discuss the controversy with Russia in strictly legal terms and insisting that “we have in our favor Article Two of the [1877] Convention, and this is the only act of which we shall make use,”³⁶ the Romanian foreign minister nevertheless underscored the historical rights and the absolute legitimacy of the “national will” embodied in “pub-

³² Telegram of General I. Ghica to M. Kogălniceanu, St. Petersburg, January 17/29, 1878, in *Documente oficiale din Corespondința diplomatică*, 24–25.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 24–25.

lic opinion” and stemming from “human consciousness.” The latter, Kogălniceanu proclaimed, “will not rest on the side of Russia, which, as a reward for the material resources that Romania has provided it with, as the price of the blood of our children generously spilled in front of Plevna, instead of giving us back [*rendre*] the entire province of Bessarabia unjustly annexed [*prise*] in 1812, wants to deprive us of the strip [*lambeau*] that we owe to the Great European Powers.”³⁷ The national narrative is reflected at its height in this passage where the rhetoric of material sacrifices, heroic feats, and historical justice combine to form a powerful case against Russia’s claims. Deliberately ignoring the issue of the proposed territorial exchange, Kogălniceanu emphasized the national solidarity that legitimized his argument. Far from being “duplicitous,” it in fact embodied the “national will” since this “[rhetorical] language is held by all the Romanians, without distinction.”³⁸ In a revealing example of the theme of national dignity, the foreign minister added a finishing touch to his statement by asserting that “Prince Gorchakov . . . will be obliged to respect us nevertheless, for even if we lose our land, we do not wish to lose our honor as well.”³⁹

The oscillation between the emphasis on national dignity and a more pragmatic approach to the “Bessarabian question” became apparent during General N. P. Ignatiev’s official visit to Bucharest at the beginning of February 1878. According to the official report sent to St. Petersburg by the Russian agent in Bucharest, Baron D. I. Stuart, General Ignatiev believed that he succeeded in convincing the Romanian government of the “futility of its attempts aimed at resisting” Russian demands.⁴⁰ Moreover, Ignatiev’s exaggerated optimism prompted him to misinterpret the reaction of the officials in Bucharest. The Romanian government seemed to be pursuing a strategy of rhetorical dissimulation meant to temporarily appease the Russian delegate while allowing Bucharest to gauge the position of the other Great Powers. The situation was in fact rather complex. Kogălniceanu, while ultimately realizing the inevitability of the territorial “exchange,”⁴¹ probably sought to buy time before assessing his country’s international situation and the domestic costs of a compromise policy. Otherwise, one can hardly explain the position of an official—previously a staunch defender of inalienable Romanian rights and Romanians’ moral

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Vinogradov et al., *Bessarabiia na perekrestke*, 152.

⁴¹ As is obvious from the telegram the foreign minister sent to the Romanian diplomatic agent in Vienna on January 17/29, 1878, cited in *Documente oficiale din Corespondința diplomatică*, 25.

superiority—who suddenly agreed to “print a brochure in which, on the basis of statistical data in Kogălniceanu’s possession, it will be argued that the part of Dobrogea offered in exchange for Bessarabia provides unquestionable advantages, that it would be impractical to ignore them and thus to provoke . . . the rancor of a mighty neighbor and ally.”⁴² Both Gorchakov and Stuart remained unconvinced by the Romanian authorities’ unexpected shift and were proven right several days after Ignatiev’s departure.⁴³ Ignatiev’s optimism is even more puzzling if one refers to Romanian diplomatic correspondence. For example, in a dispatch sent to the Romanian delegate in St. Petersburg, the Romanian foreign minister, while reinforcing the legalistic counter-arguments that Bucharest raised, also spoke about the “awkward and ugly [*pénible*] impression that the Russian demand produced throughout the entire country, above all in Moldavia, without any party distinction. The [public] spirit is very troubled [*agité*].”⁴⁴ The rhetorical consistency seems remarkable despite Ignatiev’s claims to the contrary. The terms of the political debate spurred by Ignatiev’s official communication were elaborated in the joint resolution adopted by the Romanian Parliament on January 26/February 7, 1878.⁴⁵ This document synthesized the various arguments presented above and clearly insisted on the legal and moral aspects of the problem without resorting to a specifically historical language. The rationale for “maintaining the integrity of Romanian territory” and for rejecting “any alienation of any portion of Romanian territory against any kind of territorial compensation” was based on a set of legally and morally binding political considerations. These included the following: the Great Powers’ guarantee of Romania’s territorial integrity; Russia’s signing of the 1877 Convention; the invocation of Romania’s dutiful fulfillment of the provisions of this convention and the appeal to the “sentiment of justice” of the Russian monarch; the “great sacrifices” that Romania suffered during

⁴² Vinogradov et al., *Bessarabiia na perekrestke*, 152.

⁴³ Gorchakov remarked that Ignatiev’s impression of Bucharest’s readiness to reach a compromise with the Russians was “nowhere to be seen in the telegrams sent to Ghica” from Romania, while Stuart observed that although Ignatiev’s declarations “give some grounds for admitting” a “change of mind of the Romanian government favorable to us,” he noticed “certain indices” that led him to “doubt the sincerity of such a quick and unexpected change.” See *ibid.*, 153.

⁴⁴ Telegram of M. Kogălniceanu to General I. Ghica, Bucharest, January 23 (February 4), 1878, in *Documente oficiale din Corespondința diplomatică*, 30–31. Kogălniceanu again mentioned Romanian rights “ab antiquo” and the place of Southern Bessarabia within the national “heritage.”

⁴⁵ Romania still used the Julian (old-style) calendar at the time, which was twelve days behind the Gregorian calendar used in the West.

the war; and finally, Europe's interest in the existence of an "independent and homogeneous" Romanian state.⁴⁶

As a result of these political acts, Russian-Romanian relations suffered a serious setback that caused the Romanian government to seek more reliable support from other members of the "Concert of Europe." The atmosphere of mutual suspicion only increased after the ratification of the San Stefano Treaty on February 19/March 3, 1878. Before and around that date, Russian officials attempted to appease their Romanian counterparts by insisting on the benefits that a rational and realpolitik approach would entail for Romania. This strategy was evident in an article published on February 11/23 in the quasi-official organ of the Russian Foreign Ministry, *Journal de St. Pétersbourg*, which asserted that "national concerns are to be respected on the condition that they are not exaggerated,"⁴⁷ as well as in the language used by Gorchakov's deputy, N. K. Giers, during a later conversation with Ghica. Accusing the Romanian government of "encouraging" and fomenting expressions of public "outrage" against Russia, Giers also blamed the Romanians for "being too sensitive [*susceptibles*], too inclined toward exaggerating [*grossir*] everything"⁴⁸—a veiled appeal for pragmatism and potential compromise. However, the Romanian government also had to respond to growing internal pressure from the opposition and to accusations of a faltering and even "treacherous" position in the dispute with St. Petersburg.⁴⁹

This increase in internal and diplomatic tension expressed itself in a series of memoranda issued by the Romanian Foreign Ministry (some clearly written by Kogălniceanu himself), which attempted to outline a coherent, official position on the "Bessarabian question." Kogălniceanu sent the first memorandum to Romanian diplomats abroad on February 25 (March 9), 1878, in the form of a circular note. In the preamble explaining the need

⁴⁶ *Congrès de Berlin. Actes et discours*, 14. The same arguments were repeated at length in an official letter written by the Romanian foreign minister to his Russian counterpart on January 29/February 9, as well as in Kogălniceanu's instructions to the Romanian agent in St. Petersburg on February 2/14, 1878. In the latter document, Kogălniceanu again invoked the "unanimous public opinion" that was "solemnly formulated by its legal organs" and proclaimed that the act of territorial exchange would signify "suicide" for the nation. He also referred to the argument of "ingratitude" and quoted the famous Austrian quip ("our ingratitude will surprise the world").

⁴⁷ Telegram of General I. Ghica to M. Kogălniceanu, St. Petersburg, February 11/23, 1878, in *Documente oficiale din Corespondința diplomatică*, 60.

⁴⁸ Telegram of General I. Ghica to M. Kogălniceanu, St. Petersburg, February 24/March 8, 1878, in *ibid.*, 72.

⁴⁹ This point was developed in a series of scathing articles by M. Eminescu in the conservative newspaper *Timpu*.

for such a document, Kogălniceanu stated his aim in the following way: "To succinctly present the arguments of a historical, political, and economic nature [*ordre*] upon which the Romanian Cabinet, faithful interpreter of the national sentiment . . . bases its repudiation of an exchange of Bessarabia for Dobrogea."⁵⁰ Despite his intentions, the document itself is rather peculiar when compared to the earlier emphasis of official Romanian rhetoric. Far from focusing the same attention on the three sets of ideas mentioned above, this memorandum is unmistakably economic in nature. The most plausible explanation is the intended target; namely, the future peace conference that the Romanians hoped would redress their grievances. This is confirmed not only by Foreign Minister Kogălniceanu's open admission of the fact,⁵¹ but also by the main body of the text that is structured on two fundamental premises: 1) the "European interest" that demanded Romania's possession of the left (Bessarabian) bank of the Danube in order to secure free navigation and unhindered commerce on the river and that justified the "mission" of the Romanian state on the Lower Danube; and 2) the loss of Southern Bessarabia's detrimental (if not disastrous) effect on Romania's economy and "civilization" since the country's prosperity was determined by its control over the Lower Danube.⁵² The author also stressed the "sudden revivals and brusque fluctuations caused by the shifting control of the left bank of the [Danube] river." The conclusion that Moldavia's economy suffered heavily as a result of losing Bessarabia in 1812, whereas "in 1830 Wallachia gained the most precious advantages

⁵⁰ Circular note of M. Kogălniceanu to Romanian diplomatic agents abroad, Bucharest, February 25 (March 9), 1878, in *Documente oficiale din Corespondința diplomatică*, 73.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² The memorandum eloquently defended the first point in the following terms: "The rectification of frontiers in Bessarabia, stipulated by the Treaty of 1856, and the return to the Principality of Moldavia of a portion of its ancient territory on the left bank of the Danube aimed to satisfy the double interest of European public order: 1. To secure free navigation on a river that forms the main commercial artery of Central Europe, entrusting the protection [*la garde*] of its mouths to a country of secondary importance whose constant deference to the intentions of the Powers was thereby assured; 2. To place the Romanian Principalities, due to the partial restoration of a province that had belonged to them [Bessarabia] since ancient times, in the position to fulfill, according to the requirements of topography and economic necessity, the mission delegated to them with the consent and to the advantage of Europe as a whole." The second point was summed up in the phrase: "History shows that the commercial activity of the peoples bordering the Danube slowed down or developed in direct proportion to the increase or the decrease [diminution] in their immediate contact with the river." See *Congrès de Berlin. Actes et discours*, 21.

from recovering the towns and territories of Braila, Giurgevo [Giurgiu], and Turnu,” was thus quite predictable.⁵³

An especially interesting point that Kogălniceanu emphasized was the negative assessment of the proposed territorial exchange judged to be “essentially damaging” [*préjudiciable*] to Romania. His supporting argument is worth citing at length: “It is enough . . . to examine the configuration of those places to become convinced that the loss of the Bessarabian bank would make the maintenance of Dobrogea” under Romanian control both “awkward and onerous,” since this region was “separated by a wide river from the body of the country [*corps du pays*]” and, moreover, lacked any proper means of communication with the rest of the territory (aside from some “impassable marshes”).⁵⁴ The invocation of geography as a potent and ostensibly neutral ally in this dispute is suggestive and shows the extent to which political necessity shaped official discourse. This stance could not have been more different from later arguments that rediscovered Dobrogea’s Romanianness once it was clear that the territorial exchange was inevitable.

At this stage, however, Romanian officials perceived the relative importance of Dobrogea and Southern Bessarabia in the following terms: “It is apparent that abandoning Romanian Bessarabia would entail for all of Romania the most irritating results, since the acquisition of Dobrogea would be, from the moment of the loss of the left bank of the Danube, which is the true and only key for the opposite bank, an embarrassment, a burden, and, perhaps, a permanent danger [*un danger à titre permanent*].”⁵⁵ The material interpretation of Romania’s mission on the Lower Danube was only slightly diluted in the final lines of the memorandum with the invocation of the moral and political considerations otherwise so important for direct Russian-Romanian diplomatic exchanges. The tendency to alter the emphases and terms of the dispute according to the intended audience shows the multiple rhetorical methods that constituted the supposedly unitary national discourse. To the extent that it is even possible to speak of such a discourse, the combination of pragmatic, historical, and moral elements illustrates the Romanian elites’ dexterity in subordinating their open rhetoric to the vagaries of the shifting national interest.

⁵³ Ibid. The ultimate benefits of possessing the entire left bank of the Lower Danube were not purely material since “the [Bessarabian] districts that endow this possession with its useful value” have always led to the “almost mathematical corollary of the rapid and continuous progress [*élan*] of Romanian commerce, its industry, and its interior culture,” 21.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 22.

⁵⁵ Ibid. It is not clear whether the last words refer to possible future conflicts with Bulgaria.

Following several unsuccessful attempts to find potential common ground with Russian officials from the end of February to early March 1878,⁵⁶ Romanian diplomats' pessimism was clearly expressed by the envoy in St. Petersburg in a short dispatch dated March 2/14, 1878, in which he remarked that he "[saw] the question of Bessarabia in black [tones]" and lacked "faith in the [future] Congress" since the "loss of this territory seems imminent."⁵⁷ This state of mind seemed to prevail among the Romanian leadership especially after the official reports concerning the Treaty of San Stefano reached Bucharest. The Brătianu government's reaction was expressed in two lengthy letters written by Kogălniceanu to General I. Ghica on March 8/20 and March 10/22, 1878. Since these memoranda were intended for Russian officials, the discourse of mutual historical grievances and national dignity reemerged in full force. The first letter was explicitly designed to refute the Russian reproach of ingratitude that became a recurrent theme both in official circles and in the Russian press. Reasserting Romania's deep appreciation for the "good deeds" [*bienfaits*] of the Russian Empire toward the Romanians, the Romanian foreign minister built his case using two interconnected arguments that were also developed in the second document. The first point emphasized the suffering of the Principalities as a result of their transformation into a battlefield between the Russian and Ottoman armies during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: "Haven't the Principalities been, since Peter the Great, the theater of all the major wars between Russia and Turkey—a field of battle perpetually open to the bloodiest clashes? Haven't they, for one hundred and fifty years, carried all the weight and endured all the horrors of the struggles waged on their territory?"⁵⁸ This rhetoric of national victimization was supplemented by the motive of Turkish vengeance that purportedly explained not only the detested Phanariot regime, but also the loss of Bessarabia in 1812 due to the "malevolence" of the Porte toward the Romanians.⁵⁹ The second argument, however, was much more important since it involved the principle of national dignity that demanded Romania's spirited and unified reaction. Far from displaying any material interest in claiming Southern

⁵⁶ For details on the escalating diplomatic tensions, see the telegram sent by the Romanian agent in St. Petersburg, General I. Ghica, on February 28/March 12, 1878, as well as the response by Kogălniceanu on March 1/13, 1878. While in the first document Ghica regarded any further discussion of the "Bessarabian question" with the Russian chancellor as "sterile," Kogălniceanu resorted to the strategy of "total negation," instructing Ghica to reassert the Romanian position as "*Non possumus*." See *Documente oficiale din Corespondința diplomatică*, 87–89.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁵⁸ Telegram of M. Kogălniceanu to General I. Ghica, Bucharest, March 8/20, 1878, in *Documente oficiale din Corespondința diplomatică*, 104.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 105.

Bessarabia, the language of Romanian officialdom underwent a marked shift:

The Romania of 1878 understood that it could not be less concerned about its dignity than the Moldavia of 1812 had been;⁶⁰ that it should not, at the conclusion of a war during which it displayed universally recognized valor, agree and consent to the cession of a province that the transactions [*convenances*] of the neighboring and powerful empires had at another time stolen [*enlevée*] from under its authority. Faithful repositories of the heritage [*patrimoine*] that they have received from their fathers and for which they are responsible for the sake of their children, the Romanians would renege on [*démentiraient*] their past, would betray their present, and would ruin their future if they agreed to sign the renunciation of a part of their heritage [*heritage*].⁶¹

Aside from the symbolic integration of the contested region into the image of Romanian national heritage, another interesting aspect is the implicit conflation of the three Bessarabian districts with the whole region annexed in 1812. This invocation of historical continuity was coupled with the “national will,” thereby transforming the “manifestation of national sentiment” into a “spontaneous and unanimous” act that endowed official Romanian protests with an aura of universal consent.⁶² This argument, however, proved especially vulnerable to Russian accusations against the Romanian government’s purported manipulation and instigation of collective protests and petitions (including in the contested territory) that cannot be simply dismissed, despite the Romanian foreign minister’s claims to the contrary.⁶³ In a curious attempt to reappropriate the topos of Russia’s liberating mission in the Balkans, Kogălniceanu did not hesitate to interpret it as a “glorious task to bring to life the nationalities of the Orient and to restore the

⁶⁰ An allusion to the protests of Moldavian boyars after the Russian annexation of 1812.

⁶¹ Telegram of M. Kogălniceanu to General I. Ghica, Bucharest, March 8/20, 1878, in *Documente oficiale din Corespondința diplomatică*, 106.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 107. The recrimination addressed to the Romanian prince in a later conversation held in April 1878 proceeded from a similar starting point. Baron D. I. Stuart remarked that “the complete indifference that the country exhibited toward Bessarabia until the day when the question of its retrocession to Russia arose gives one grounds to doubt the sincerity of the feelings that provoked the complaints in connection with the return of this piece of land.” Cited in Vinogradov et al., *Bessarabiia na perekrestke*, 162. Kogălniceanu spoke about the “explosion of legitimate patriotism, alarmed by certain sudden revelations” and accused his conservative opponents of returning to their “old errors” and serving as a “polemical instrument.”

integrity of their patrimonial territories.”⁶⁴ This tendency to challenge Russian visions of the empire’s role in the Romanian Principalities and the region as a whole from within—insisting on the weaknesses and inconsistencies of the imperial narrative—was even more pronounced in a subsequent letter discussing the historical background of the “Bessarabian question.”

The memorandum of March 10/22, 1878, occupies a special place among the plethora of official and quasi-official signals exchanged between Bucharest and St. Petersburg in the early months of 1878. It has an unmistakably historical character and showcases Kogălniceanu’s claim to professional expertise as much as his political competence. The main focus of the document is a historical overview of Russian-Romanian relations during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries analyzed through the lens of the relative benefits and drawbacks for the Principalities resulting from Russian peace settlements with the Ottoman Empire and the Russian protectorate that functioned from 1774 until 1856.⁶⁵ The details of the account are of little relevance to the dynamics of Russian-Romanian polemics. In fact, the narrative followed the pattern of the previous letter, emphasizing the “calamities” that befell the Principalities as a result of the armed clashes between Russian and Ottoman forces. The theme of Turkish vengeance is also elaborated in greater detail. The figure of Count Kiselev represents the only significant exception to this bleak picture—an exception, however, that confirms the rule. Thus, the period between 1829 and 1834 is described as “an epoch in which the Principalities’ unwavering confidence in and traditionally positive attitude toward Russia at last found their reward,” while Kiselev himself “left indelible memories in the hearts of Romanians.”⁶⁶ This comparative discussion of Russian-Romanian relations clearly left Russia with a moral debit that could not be compensated by the sum of past events.

Much more relevant than the narrative part of the memorandum are several general remarks that the author strategically places in the introduction and conclusion of the document. First, Kogălniceanu records his belief in history as an almost transcendental and illuminating force that could provide the ultimate arguments for the dispute. Though the balance between romantic and positivist elements in his appeal to history’s judgment

⁶⁴ Telegram of M. Kogălniceanu to General I. Ghica, Bucharest, March 8/20, 1878, in *Documente oficiale din Corespondința diplomatică*, 108. The usual elements of Romania’s “moral superiority” were also present in the final part of the document.

⁶⁵ Telegram of M. Kogălniceanu to General I. Ghica, Bucharest, March 10/22, 1878, in *ibid.*, 108–15.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 113.

is difficult to assess, his phrases are revealing: “The principles of loyal historical criticism would demand that the parallel annals of Russia and Romania shed [*se prêtassent*] light on one another” in order to determine “on which side there is impartiality and on which side the sincerity of history suffers.”⁶⁷ The invocation of objectivity is by no means accidental since the author’s professed aim is to transcend the polemical spirit (stirred up by “certain passions and a so-called [*prétendue*] *raison d’état*”) and thus achieve a scholarly understanding of the controversies.⁶⁸ Second, the author deploys evasive tactics that appear to avoid discussing certain aspects of the “Bessarabian question,” but in fact amount to a dismissal of the arguments invoked by the Russian press and official circles. This strategy of discursive suspension is especially important since it addresses the national sensitivities of Romanian nation-builders. Thus, Kogălniceanu asserts:

I refrain from discussing the question of the true nationality of the inhabitants of the Bessarabian districts and the proprietary rights [*titres de propriété*] of Romania to Bessarabia. The nature of this nationality and the authenticity of these rights are sufficiently proven by irrefutable documents, and the scholarly [*savantes*] responses of our publicists to the scientifically erroneous assertions of certain Russian [press] organs have already discredited [*renversé*] the theses that ingeniously tried to demonstrate that Bessarabia had been conquered from the Tatar hordes by Russian armies, and [thus] belongs to Russia by the sovereign right of force.⁶⁹

The opposition between the “scholarly” stance of the Romanian press and the “polemical” extremes to which its Russian opponents presumably resorted served to reinforce the veiled yet potent claim about the Romanian public’s privileged access to historical truth. Thus, behind Kogălniceanu’s modest claim to provide a balance sheet of Russian-Romanian relations was an entire set of presuppositions embedded in the national narrative that he helped to create. Third, the Romanian foreign minister emphasized a point that revealed his understanding of the importance of collective rituals of remembrance in the symbolic competition for territory. The peculiarity of his argument was the “pro-Russian” twist that he included. He elaborated on an “eloquent symptom of our sentiments toward Russia” that signaled a fundamental difference in the commemoration of the loss of

⁶⁷ Ibid., 108.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid. This passage is also revealing in that it shows the extent to which official Romanian discourse was aware of and exploited the rhetoric of intellectuals, even if this rhetoric came from opposition circles. In this context, it is almost certain that Kogălniceanu is referring to Eminescu’s articles, which represented the most consistent and detailed response in the Romanian press at the time.

Bukovina in 1775 and Bessarabia in 1812. The 1775 events were “the object of a [yearly] patriotic ceremony of a somewhat funerary character”⁷⁰ that gradually became a “periodic protest”—expressed by religious services in memory of Prince Grigore Ghica who was beheaded by the Ottomans for resisting the Austrian annexation of Bukovina—which, he maintained, occurred “despite our excellent relations with Austria-Hungary.”⁷¹ The attitude toward the annexation of Bessarabia, however, was completely different: “Never has the loss of Bessarabia in 1812, as alive [*vivace*] and painful as the memory still is, been mourned by analogous manifestations, for the respect of the Romanians toward the court of Russia has always constrained the explosion of their regrets.”⁷² Bessarabia’s marginality within Romanian national discourse was thus transformed into an additional argument for reinforcing the moral superiority that the Romanians claimed in their dealings with the Russian Empire. This symbolic inversion also sought to invalidate Russian accusations of the Romanian government’s indifference to its Southern Bessarabian districts that figured prominently in Russia’s rhetorical arsenal, and rebut the accusation of ingratitude that characterized this stage of the dispute.⁷³

Both documents discussed above should be seen as part of the Romanian diplomats’ wider efforts to protest against the Treaty of San Stefano. Though only tangentially referring to the narrower Russian-Romanian controversy over Bessarabia, a further important piece of the puzzle was added on March 16/28, 1878, when the Romanian Foreign Ministry sent out a circular note to its representatives abroad arguing forcefully against the provisions of the treaty. The issue of Southern Bessarabia was only discussed to the extent that it fit the agenda of “European interests,” and when the issue was raised the arguments resembled those presented in the earlier memorandum of February 25/March 9—with more attention devoted to matters linked to secure navigation on the Danube if Russia were admitted to the European Commission overseeing the river.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Telegram of M. Kogălniceanu to General I. Ghica, Bucharest, March 10/22, 1878, in *Documente oficiale din Corespondința diplomatică*, 115.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ With a final flourish of his rhetorical pen, Kogălniceanu accused the Russian Empire of falsely claiming to have “kept its word to evacuate the Romanian Principalities following the end of military occupations,” thereby invoking Bessarabia’s annexation in 1812.

⁷⁴ Telegram of M. Kogălniceanu to the diplomatic agents of Romania, Bucharest, March 16/28, 1878. The “Bessarabian question” was only mentioned in connection with the “competence of Europe” necessary to solve it, since it “implies an essential modification of the European accomplishment of 1856 through a dis-

The previously discussed official papers are highly relevant for one of the most detailed and cogent Russian responses to the Romanian position. This response appeared in the semi-official journal of the Russian Foreign Ministry, *Journal de St. Pétersbourg*, as a front-page article in the March 16/28, 1878, issue. It represented a direct reaction to the official Romanian view outlined by Kogălniceanu, and it provided a summary of the Russian position recycling some motifs from the earlier diplomatic controversy. The author, most likely a Foreign Ministry official, used a wide array of arguments (some of them similar to later Soviet positions) in order to rebut the official Romanian position. Some of these arguments are especially eloquent. First, at the time of Southern Bessarabia's "detachment" from Russia in 1856, the Romanian state did not exist as such and the territorial provisions of the Treaty of Paris did not conform to any "law or right," but simply to "European interest." Second, the Treaty of 1856, which serves as the only legal basis for Romania's possession of Southern Bessarabia, no longer has juridical power because of its constant violation by all signatories. Third, Romania's military alliance with Russia presupposed a clear knowledge of Russian territorial demands, and all Romanian claims to the contrary are but a strategy of deliberate dissimulation. Fourth, the Romanian administration proved inefficient and detrimental to the territory in question and this leaves no moral justification for Romanian claims. Finally, the strategic and economic importance of Dobrogea represents "more than adequate" compensation for Southern Bessarabia.⁷⁵ This refutation of the Romanian position—expressed in clearer terms than the earlier, disjointed observations of Russian officials—also signaled the apogee of the diplomatic dispute over the "Bessarabian question."

From this point forward, this issue faded from the field of open Russian-Romanian polemics for several reasons. First, the controversy, while not entirely resolved, moved from the discursive sphere to the sphere of international power. The Romanian government now had to confront the reality of the provisions of the Treaty of San Stefano and seek accommodation with its internal opposition along with the international complications that dominated relations within the European concert. Even though the Romanian leadership still declared that "we have firmly decided not to negotiate [*transiger*]"⁷⁶ any terms of a settlement with Russia regarding Bessarabia, it in fact attempted to mute this issue in hopes of submitting its

placement of domination in a region where all of Europe has constant interests," in *Documente oficiale din Corespondința diplomatică*, 118.

⁷⁵ Vinogradov et al., *Bessarabiia na perekrestke*, 157–60.

⁷⁶ Circular telegram of M. Kogălniceanu to Romanian diplomatic agents abroad, Bucharest, March 16/28, 1878, in *Documente oficiale din Corespondința diplomatică*, 121.

grievances to the peace congress that was scheduled to open in Berlin in June 1878. Second, more practical matters overshadowed the “Bessarabian question” once the stipulations of the Treaty of San Stefano became an object of close analysis. In the lengthy note of protest submitted to the Russian government on March 24/April 5, 1878, the retrocession of Bessarabia figured among other grievances only insofar as “the free and effective control of the mouths of the great river [the Danube]”⁷⁷ was concerned. Third, Romanian leaders now concentrated on presenting their case to Western powers and attracting the attention of European chancelleries to their interests on the Lower Danube. The two months preceding the Berlin Congress witnessed a flurry of intense diplomatic activity as Romanian envoys in Western capitals aimed to assess the position of the European powers at the upcoming negotiations. These attempts to exploit the rivalries within the European concert ultimately failed⁷⁸ due to the secret negotiations between the major European powers that resulted in a preliminary settlement. The Romanian government’s only success was the admission of its plenipotentiaries (M. Kogălniceanu and I. C. Brătianu) to the proceedings of the Congress in order to present their case at one of its meetings. The issue of Southern Bessarabia thus gradually left the arena of international polemics.

The final attempt to use the combined strategies of *realpolitik* and historical rights in order to defend Romania’s territorial integrity occurred in Kogălniceanu’s memorandum that he read before the official delegations at the Berlin Congress on June 19/July 1, 1878. As a result of a number of private conversations with the plenipotentiaries of European governments, the Romanian delegates finally realized the futility of their rhetorical and diplomatic efforts. In a dispatch sent from Berlin on June 9/21 to his temporary deputy in Bucharest, Kogălniceanu admitted as much when he reported that “the illusions that we might have preserved would be fatally crushed: Bessarabia must be regarded as lost, despite all our efforts; it would still be almost too much to believe in one favorable chance against ninety-nine unfavorable [ones].”⁷⁹ The Romanian position at the Congress was outlined in two variants of the memorandum given first in written form and then orally by Kogălniceanu at the meeting on June 19/July 1, 1878. The importance of these papers stems from the peculiar combination of

⁷⁷ Telegram of M. Kogălniceanu to General I. Ghica, Bucharest, March 24/April 5, 1878, in *ibid.*, 127.

⁷⁸ See the telegrams of the Russian diplomatic agent in Bucharest reporting on the “probing” of potential Romanian participation in the eventual war between Russia and Great Britain or Austria-Hungary and the angry reaction of the Russian officials in Vinogradov et al., *Bessarabiia na perekrestke*, 163–64.

⁷⁹ Report of M. Kogălniceanu to the interim foreign minister in Bucharest, Berlin, June 9/21, 1878, in *Documente oficiale din Corespondința diplomatică*, 165.

legalistic, economic, and national arguments, all inspired by an underlying vision of a special mission of “order, civilization, and progress” that Romania was to fulfill in the “Orient.”⁸⁰ The first account emphasized the evolution of the diplomatic conflict with Russia, following the usual pattern of invoking the April 1877 Convention and insisting on Romania’s role in the campaign.

Romanian claims were then reinforced by two additional considerations. One of them was related to the material circumstances that made the Danube a precondition for the existence of the Romanian state.⁸¹ While the first argument rested on the particular interests of Romania, the second referred in a slightly veiled manner to the national sentiment that did not square well with the mainstream stance favoring the European interest. Tellingly, the national discourse was diluted by emphasizing the importance of Bessarabia as an outlet to the sea.⁸² Further emphasizing the danger to Romania’s international status that an annulled collective guarantee of the Great Powers would pose, the Romanian delegation used these general premises to outline five conditions that responded to “the legitimate necessities and desires of the country.”⁸³ These five points that provided the structure for the second memorandum included: 1) the refusal to cede any part of Romanian territory (directly referring to Bessarabia); 2) the request to abolish the provision stipulating the right of passage for Russian troops through Romania for a period of two years; 3) the restoration of the mouths and islands of the Lower Danube to Romania; 4) the awarding of financial compensation (indemnities) in proportion to the country’s losses during the war; and 5) the affirmation of Romania’s independence and neutrality.⁸⁴

For the purposes of the present study, the first point is of special significance. The peculiarity of the Romanian stance concerning Bessarabia as

⁸⁰ This characteristic motif of the “European mission” that justified Romania’s role in the region was expressed in the following words: “The particular interest of the Romanian nation is in complete harmony with the general interest of Europe. Because of its geographical location, its cause is that of the Orient’s calm [*repos*] and peace.” See *Congrès de Berlin. Actes et discours*, 7.

⁸¹ “The country that was once called the Danubian Principalities could not give up the most important part of the river to which it owed its ancient denomination, its commercial development, and the benefits of its geographical situation,” in *ibid.*, 6.

⁸² “Romania attaches an even greater price to the preservation of a province that is a part of the country’s body [*fait corps avec le pays*] and puts it into contact with the sea, since it has better appreciated, after the loss of the whole of Bessarabia suffered in 1812, the advantages of the partial restitution effected in 1856,” *ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 7

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

expressed in the second memorandum resided in the change of rhetorical emphasis. Thus, aside from detailing the “argument from interest” addressed specifically to the representatives of the European concert, the Romanian delegates insisted to an unprecedented degree on the notion of historical rights usually reserved for bilateral diplomatic skirmishes with Russia. This discursive shift was probably meant to impress the Russian negotiators, who foresaw the potential complications and were reluctant to admit Romania’s delegation to the Congress proceedings.⁸⁵ Kogălniceanu’s presentation in fact represented a systematic (albeit self-contained) rebuttal of the fundamental Russian claims on Bessarabia. His address can be interpreted as an implicit response to the series of Russian arguments discussed above. The most important among these included the presumed right of conquest by which the Russian Empire legitimized its possession of Bessarabia. Declaring that “the partition [*morcellement*] of 1812 could not be justified by the fact or the right of conquest,” Kogălniceanu based his position on a two-pronged strategy in which the repeated conflation of the 1812 and 1878 events was conspicuous. First, he invoked the external status of the Principalities at the time of both founding moments, arguing that “in 1812 Bessarabia depended on a Principality whose autonomy had been guaranteed in all the treaties previously concluded between the Russian and Ottoman empires.”⁸⁶ Second, as a corollary of this assertion, the Moldavian Principality acquired a clear institutional, legal, and even national identity at the time of Bessarabia’s annexation in 1812. This situa-

⁸⁵ *Les Protocoles du Congrès de Berlin avec le traité préliminaire de San Stefano et le Traité de Berlin* (Bucharest: Imprimerie Officielle, 1878), 67. The debates sparked by the discussion of the conditions of Romanian independence are quite revealing for the alignment of opinions among the Great Powers. While the principle of territorial exchange was accepted by the majority of the plenipotentiaries, the only dissenting opinion was (unsurprisingly) expressed by the British prime minister, who “regard[ed] with the deepest regret the provisions of Article Nineteen of the Treaty of San Stefano relative to Bessarabia.” His protest was of course based on “legal” arguments (the “letter” of the Paris Treaty) and his “fears” concerning the freedom of navigation on the Danube. The objections of his Russian counterparts centered on the distinction between the legal status of Moldavia in 1856 (which was at the time part of the Ottoman Empire) and the Romanian Principalities, and on the importance of the retrocession as a “question of honor” (as opposed to “interest and ambition”) for the Russian Empire. An additional argument invoked by Gorchakov referred to the “value of the exchange” and to Dobrogea’s superiority in comparison to Bessarabia. The Russian chancellor remarked that the annexation of Dobrogea would entail “the growth of [Romania’s] territory by . . . 3,500 sq. km and 80,000 souls” and would secure for Romania the Danube Delta, certain agricultural districts, and a good commercial port on the Black Sea [Constanța]. For more on these polemics, see 68–70.

⁸⁶ *Congrès de Berlin. Actes et discours*, 9.

tion was presumably confirmed by Emperor Alexander I in the official decree sanctioning Bessarabia's integration into the empire.⁸⁷

Other arguments in support of Russian ownership included the following: the claim of a predominantly Tatar historical legacy in Southern Bessarabia that rendered Russia's "civilizing mission" in the region both necessary and logical and discredited Romanian claims to Bessarabia;⁸⁸ the trope of a "liberating mission" in the Balkans and the memory of past military exploits that reinforced Russia's historical rights to Bessarabia;⁸⁹ and finally, the much-debated reproach of ingratitude already laboriously refuted by Kogălniceanu in the earlier memoranda and treated here as a balance sheet of gains and losses, of which the most significant was "the loss, to Russia's advantage, of half of Moldavia, that is, Bessarabia from the Prut to the Dniester."⁹⁰ Brătianu added a more pragmatic dimension to this polemical discourse replete with historical references, pointing to the dangers that would result from the projected "dispossession" for Romania's future national development as well as for the successful fulfillment of its progressive mission in the region.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Ibid., 9–10. Kogălniceanu asserted: "It [Bessarbia] was thus a Romanian country, with Romanian institutions and laws, explicitly maintained by H. M. the Emperor Alexander I. This respect for the ancient nationality [sic] was formulated in the imperial decree promulgating the administrative and judicial organization of this province following its incorporation into Russia, without the least distinction being made between Lower and Upper Bessarabia." The retrospective discovery of national elements in early imperial policy in Bessarabia is not altogether surprising given the polemical context.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 10. Kogălniceanu countered the Russian claims by emphasizing that "one apparently wished to conclude that Bessarabia was a Turkish or Tatar region from the simple fact that the Ottomans occupied three fortresses there. But the history of Wallachia presents an analogous anomaly: Turkish fortresses have existed there for a long time; it does not mean, however, that Wallachia was ever a Turkish country."

⁸⁹ Ibid. Kogălniceanu asserts that "Memories of military glory and valor have been invoked to support the retrocession of Bessarabia. But during a long series of wars the Russian armies have distinguished themselves on plenty of battlefields and have carried their glory as far as the walls of Adrianople. This, however, does not represent a title to the property of the Balkan region." The impact of the recurring myth of Russian expansionism is thinly disguised here.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 12. "I would simply allow myself to add that the dispossession of a part of our heritage would cause not only profound pain for the Romanian nation; it would also destroy any confidence in the effectiveness of treaties and in the observation both of absolute justice and of written law. The troubles [*le trouble*] that [our] belief in the future would suffer would paralyze [our] peaceful development and [our] enthusiasm [*élan*] for progress."

The practical impact of these impassioned pleas was minimal, but their importance as illustrations of Bessarabia's symbolic place within Romanian national discourse was paramount. The 1878 controversy remained a defining moment for later nationalist reworkings of the Bessarabian issue in the twentieth century and provided both the lexicon and most of the themes that were merely recycled in later phases. The analysis above is certainly one-sided. Above all, it privileged official diplomatic discourse instead of focusing on the possible alternative stances of intellectuals and public figures opposed to the government's agenda. I aimed, however, to focus on the government's position because of the constraints of *realpolitik* that existed at this level and in order to demonstrate how flexible national discourse could become under such strain. Pragmatic considerations of diplomacy and interest accompanied the organicist and historical spheres of national discourse in an uneasy alliance whose terms shifted due as much to internal oscillations as to external irritants. Most importantly, both the Russian and the Romanian cases should be studied in close interaction since they responded to each other's arguments and opened new areas of controversy. My ultimate goal was to identify the terms under which Bessarabia became integrated into Romanian national discourse.

In addition to confirming Romania's independence under certain conditions,⁹² the Berlin Congress marked the high point of the internationalization of the "Bessarabian question" and also induced a fundamental shift in the formulation of Romanian foreign policy until World War I. In fact, aside from certain symbolically charged moments such as the anniversary of Bessarabia's annexation in 1912, Romania's official stance consciously avoided any claims that might have been interpreted as irredentist. This position was clearly articulated by the same person who elaborated Romania's foreign policy during the Russian-Romanian 1878 controversy, Mihail Kogălniceanu. In a speech before the Romanian Parliament on September 30, 1878, on the occasion of the Berlin Treaty's ratification and in response to a speech by D. A. Sturdza, who argued for an intransigent attitude toward any territorial exchange, Kogălniceanu declared: "What aspirations can we Romanians have? Could we harbor any beyond the Carpathians or beyond the Prut? Would [Mr. Sturdza] dare recommend to his country such a revolutionary policy, and can we hope to secure the future of our fatherland by such a policy? God can bend mountains and dry rivers in the

⁹² The most important conditions were the acceptance of the territorial exchange proposed by the Russian Empire, the granting of civil rights to all Romanian citizens regardless of religious affiliation (which provoked a fiery debate on "the Jewish question"), and the resolution of certain pending financial conflicts with a number of Western (mostly German) creditors (such as the so-called "Strosberg affair").

future, but if we want to enter and live peacefully within the family of European states, we must . . . live in peace with our neighbors, the Russians and the Hungarians, by repudiating any policy of [territorial] claims beyond the Prut and the Carpathians.”⁹³ Thus, the impact of *realpolitik* finally superseded the notion of national dignity that informed Romanian diplomats’ negotiations with their Russian counterparts in 1878. Yet, inflammatory anti-Russian rhetoric only sporadically present before 1878 was now systematized due to the efforts of thinkers such as Eminescu, thus becoming part and parcel of Romania’s national narrative. This quasi-consensus was rarely broken and was only seriously questioned during World War I.

The comparison between the importance of Southern Bessarabia and Dobrogea for the Romanian state surfaced during the early phases of the 1878 conflict when it became apparent that a neutral stance on this question was no longer possible or desirable. As is clear from the fragments discussed above, the Romanian authorities and the press rejected the idea of a territorial bargain during the initial phase of the conflict. This attitude was also on display in the debates that took place in the Romanian Parliament during late January 1878 in the context of the resolution reaffirming Romania’s territorial integrity. The rejection of any territorial compensation was motivated by the nature of the Romanian nation itself, whose essence would be altered by such an event: “The Romanians are a homogeneous nation, without any expansionist ambitions, preoccupied not to sow tempests for the future.”⁹⁴ In fact, this position anticipated two of the later arguments that enriched the rhetorical arsenal of the Conservative opposition. One claimed that Russia’s hidden intention lurking behind its apparently generous proposal for Dobrogea’s inclusion into Romania was to reclaim this territory at a convenient time because of strategic considerations. The second was linked to the perceived permanent threat for Bulgarian-Romanian relations that the contested status of Dobrogea would pose if Romania annexed the region.

The discourse on Dobrogea’s role in Romania’s future development derived from the way in which Bessarabia’s separation from the “national body” was viewed. The image of the territory situated between the Danube and the Black Sea was thus anything but stable. While initially regarded as a barren territory consisting of nothing but marshes and a few insignificant settlements on the Black Sea, mostly inhabited by a mixed Muslim and Slavic population that appeared to threaten the homogeneity of the Roma-

⁹³ Mihail Kogălniceanu, *Discursuri parlamentare* [Parliamentary speeches] (Bucharest: Minerva, 1994), 142.

⁹⁴ Apostol Stan, “Rezistența la raptul Basarabiei în 1878” [The resistance to Bessarabia’s alienation in 1878], *Revista istorică* 3 (1992): 61–80, here 68.

nian nation, the region gradually came to be seen as both materially superior to Southern Bessarabia and better suited to become an integral part of Romania. Moreover, the trope of Romania's civilizing mission was invoked within an unmistakably "orientalizing" frame that turned Dobrogea into a laboratory for the transformative designs of the Romanian nation-state. Another important feature was the "rediscovery" of the region's historical Romanianness that provided additional justification for the annexation. The "European interest" that Romania had to consider was also part of the rhetorical arsenal used to integrate the new territory into the ideal image of the Romanian fatherland. In what follows, I will discuss the evolving picture of the newly acquired province in comparison to Bessarabia through a broader overview of Romania's role in the Balkans.

The most consistent position on the issue of Dobrogea's relative importance vis-à-vis Bessarabia emerged from Romanian Russophile circles. Though meagerly represented in the overall intellectual life of Romania, Russophiles' texts fully internalized the logic of Russian arguments presented during the controversy on Southern Bessarabia and evaluated Dobrogea's integration into Romania in terms of relative gains and losses. One of the most interesting examples of this stance comes from a later work on Russian-Romanian relations written from a pro-Russian perspective. In this rare instance of a counter-current to the mainstream national narrative, Dobrogea is presented as "hardly a thing to despise" since it is "superior to Bessarabia."⁹⁵ In order to substantiate his claim, the author uses a whole set of material arguments designed to convince the reader: 1) Dobrogea's greater territorial extension and its proximity to the mouths of the Danube where a flourishing commercial activity was developing; 2) Dobrogea's longer Black Sea coastline compared to Bessarabia's (225 km versus 85 km of sea littoral), as well as its more favorable geographical setting; 3) the existence of three important sea ports in Dobrogea (Sulina, Constanța, and Mangalia) as opposed to none in Southern Bessarabia; 4) the region's fertile soil and rich mineral resources, which clearly surpassed those of Southern Bessarabia both in number and variety; and 5) the strategic and military advantages that the control of Dobrogea afforded in the case of future wars, including better conditions for building a defense line using "powerful natural frontiers," in contrast to Southern Bessarabia's frontiers, which were indefensible.⁹⁶ Tellingly, a historical argument is only introduced in order to minimize the impact of Bessarabia's loss. Thus, the writer emphasizes that "our rights have extended in ancient times to Dobrogea as well" and "along the Danube and in the northern part of Dobrogea a large Romanian population has existed for a long time," concluding that "the coun-

⁹⁵ Calmuschi, *Relațiunile politice ale Țărilor Române cu Rusia*, 288.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 288–89.

try that has been given to us is not wholly foreign.”⁹⁷ The combination of strategic-material and historical arguments even in an account defending the Russian position in the dispute over Bessarabia versus Dobrogea shows the salience of the discourse of historical rights and its pervasive influence throughout the period.

A more interesting picture emerges from several articles written by Eminescu on the problem of Romania’s annexation of Dobrogea. While his overall contribution to the articulation of the Romanian vision of Bessarabia was analyzed elsewhere, his articles on Dobrogea represent a separate subject and provide a cogent counter-argument both to the intransigent position of certain dissident Liberal groups protesting against the exchange and to the position of the government—which Conservatives accused of duplicity and double-dealing. Eminescu’s position is discernible mainly from two articles published in the official Conservative newspaper in August 1878.⁹⁸ The first article represented a reaction to the skeptical view of Dobrogea’s acquisition promoted by the “free and independent faction” of the Liberal Party, consisting of a group of politicians based in Moldavia who—along with a number of other political figures of the Liberal Party, most notably D. A. Sturdza—rejected any compromise on the “Bessarabian question.”⁹⁹ For our purposes, two of Eminescu’s considerations are worth emphasizing. First, unlike his opponents, Dobrogea represented for him a barrier to Slavic advancement that was much more formidable than Southern Bessarabia. Far from rejecting the substance of the anti-Slavic argument, he turned it on its head: “By not accepting Dobrogea, we leave . . . a free path for Russia in the Balkan Peninsula. Moreover, the mixing and

⁹⁷ Ibid., 289.

⁹⁸ The first article was published in the issue of August 2, 1878, and the second (explicitly titled “Dobrogea’s Annexation”) appeared on August 16, 1878. Both articles were reactions to the provisions of the Berlin Treaty. Thus, Eminescu’s “conciliatory” position toward Dobrogea’s inclusion into Romania should be viewed in this context. Both articles are included in Eminescu, *Basarabia*, 43–49 and 52–62 respectively.

⁹⁹ The points that Eminescu opposed can be summarized as follows: 1. the purported “contamination” of the Romanian “Latin” race with Bulgarian elements from Dobrogea, which would eventually lead to Romanians being “engulfed” by Slavs; 2. the complications for Romanian-Bulgarian relations and Russia’s role as an “arbiter” in the dispute that would increase Romania’s dependence on its eastern neighbor; 3. the necessity of maintaining a standing army in Dobrogea in order to control its “savage” population and the increasing financial burden; 4. the further financial expenses necessary to transform the “marshy” province into a productive part of the country; and 5. the possibility of Bulgarian territorial claims that could be supported by Russia at a later date, thereby undermining Romania’s control of Dobrogea.

contact with the Slavic race [in Dobrogea] cannot be proven since Dobrogea is not inhabited by Bulgarians, but for the most part by Romanians, Turks, and Tatars.”¹⁰⁰

This is not the only instance when the image of Dobrogea as a bulwark against Russian expansionism surfaces in Eminescu's writings. In the introduction to an earlier series of articles discussing the parallel historical destinies of Bessarabia and Bukovina, he highlights Dobrogea's ability to obstruct Russian communication with Bulgaria.¹⁰¹ However, he uses this argument to substantiate a totally different point. In Eminescu's own words, “admitting the legitimacy of Russia's interests, we do not understand how Russia [can] offer us Dobrogea in exchange [for Bessarabia], since, as soon as Dobrogea becomes a Romanian territory, communication between Russia and Bulgaria could only be conducted through our country . . . In any case, Russia can only grant us Dobrogea on the condition of later forcing us to give it up in her favor.”¹⁰² Though the logic of the two examples is revealing, the central piece of the argument stressing the comparative strategic advantage of Dobrogea is worth noting.¹⁰³

The second part of Eminescu's statement is much more puzzling, however. His position represents a fascinating instance of the manipulation of Orientalism and suggests to what extent Orientalist lines of argumentation could be subverted from within. In Eminescu's hierarchy of ethnic dangers, the Slavic element clearly took precedence over any other group, including the undoubtedly oriental but essentially harmless Turkish and Tatar populations of Dobrogea. The tendency to view the Bulgarian (i.e., Slavic) inhabitants of the region as a major threat prompted him to exonerate Dobrogea's Turks and Tatars from the stigma of “savagery” prevalent in the discourse of opposition Liberals.

This rhetorical twist did not mean abandoning Orientalist logic altogether. On the contrary, Dobrogea was regarded as a “small Orient” waiting to be cultivated by the intelligent and cautious policy of the Romanian nation-state: “To do what everybody does, that is, to take and possess [Dobrogea] through the bayonet, is an easy thing; on the contrary, to preserve this ‘Orient in miniature,’ with its mix of peoples, to prove that we have enough justice and enough prudence to hold the most diverse elements in equilibrium and in good peace is an art—the true and real policy—compared to which the policy of brute force is nothing but a

¹⁰⁰ Eminescu, *Basarabia*, 45.

¹⁰¹ Eminescu, *Bucovina și Basarabia*, 26.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Here the parallel with the considerations presented in Nelidov's abortive memorandum that envisaged alternative territorial compensation for Romania is striking.

toy.”¹⁰⁴ Romania’s mission thus rested upon the presumed moral superiority of the Romanian nation that had to invest its best qualities in the administration of Dobrogea and become a better civilizer than its counterparts elsewhere.

This mission, however, was also fundamentally different because of the existence of a “civilized Orient” in Dobrogea. The local Turks’ and Tatars’ “civilized” credentials were based on two premises: the specificity of their settlement patterns and economic activity and the existence of national consciousness in their midst. Thus, Eminescu argued that Dobrogea’s Tatars “are not savage” since they “are for the most part emigrants from the steppes of the Kuban . . . and agriculturalists who . . . produce significant quantities of grain for export. Those who are working for export . . . and who become producers and consumers in Europe’s general economy cannot be called savage.”¹⁰⁵ The author reinforced his claim by pointing to the flourishing urban and railway development that was supposedly initiated by the same Tatars, thus portraying them as quintessentially modern.¹⁰⁶

Similarly, Eminescu presents the Turks, conflated in a typically Orientalist fashion under the same category of “Muslim population,” as both politically and nationally conscious: “With what right could we complain that our people are being divided like a silent flock, if we ourselves treat as a silent flock the parts of a people who also possess great qualities and especially powerful and not entirely unfounded national susceptibilities? Or maybe Dobrogea’s Turks, with their magnificent military past, they the conquerors on three continents, could be regarded as a spineless herd, which does not care what master rules over it?”¹⁰⁷ Far from being exotic and immobile, local Muslims appear as essential allies in Romania’s civilizing project in the Balkan “Orient.” This eccentric and illogical view is rather consistent if one takes into account Eminescu’s attitude toward the Russian Empire as the greatest danger to the existence of the Romanian state. Without dwelling on this point here, it is worth noting that Eminescu’s stance is not as unique for his epoch as it might seem. His argument recalls the same logic of the earlier anti-Russian diatribes of Ion Heliade Rădulescu, who saw the reforming Ottoman Empire of the 1850s as the “lesser evil” (and perhaps even a useful ally) compared to the stifling influence of the despotic Russian protectorate.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Eminescu, *Basarabia*, 57.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁰⁸ See I. Heliade Rădulescu, *Protectoratul Țarului sau România și Rusia: Noi documente asupra situației europene* [The Tsar’s protectorate, or Romania and Russia:

The rhetorical strategy of the Romanian publicist also contained a significant historical narrative meant to legitimize Romania's control of Dobrogea. Based on a personal reconstruction of the Thracian, Roman, and finally the short-lived Wallachian presence in the region, the thesis of Romanian continuity as applied to Dobrogea added an *ex post facto* legitimacy to the annexation sanctioned by the European powers.¹⁰⁹ The final part of Eminescu's claims reinforced the notion of moral superiority. Romania's position in Dobrogea was, in principle, in accordance with political morality for two reasons. First, the Conservative journalist categorically rejected the logic of territorial exchange that informed the Liberal government's negotiations with the Russian authorities. Eminescu's image of the Romanian nation-state as an organic entity naturally compelled him to protest against the view of Dobrogea as "compensation for Bessarabia."¹¹⁰ Second, this region could be integrated into Romania only on the basis of a peaceful conquest that would correspond to Romania's civilizing mission and to the perceived interest of the local inhabitants who possessed the proprietary rights to their territory as opposed to the Romanians' historical rights. He emphasized the importance of obtaining the local population's consent since it represented the concrete application of the principle of national solidarity, which alone could, in Eminescu's view, assure the success of Romania's mission in the newly acquired province.¹¹¹

The apparent pragmatism of these considerations derived from the link between the expression of the "national will" and the possibility of a real merging of the region with the national body. The national will represented the basic moral principle upon which a reconstruction of Dobrogea along modern and national lines was feasible. In its absence, the region would continue to languish in a "state of nature" that made it a "desert" and a "marshy and unhealthy" though "fertile" piece of land.¹¹² Thus, the cultivation of

New documents concerning the European situation] (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 2002), 5.

¹⁰⁹ Historical accounts constitute an important dimension of both articles discussed here. In both cases, Eminescu proceeds from the conclusion that "from a historical point of view, our rights to Dobrogea cannot be contested" (and that in the absence of these rights the "European interest" demanding Dobrogea's annexation would be "null and void") in order to present his readers with condensed versions of the province's history. See Eminescu, *Basarabia*, 47–48, and 58–60.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 48: "We have said from the start that there cannot be any compensation for Bessarabia, as there can never be any fee for even a small portion [*palmă*] of the fatherland's soil. These are holy things that are lost or gained through historical circumstances, but can neither be sold, nor bought, nor exchanged."

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 60–61. In a very interesting parallel, the principle of consent sanctioned by referendum was illustrated through the examples of Nice and Savoy.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 62.

Dobrogea entailed not so much a material component (although that was certainly indispensable), but a spiritual investment that was attainable by merging the national psyche of its inhabitants with the rest of the country. The perception of Dobrogea as a potential threat to the viability of the Romanian state thus resurfaced again, but this time in the form of a warning rather than a threat. Eminescu's distinction between the principles of political morality and state pragmatism allowed him to present his case in terms of *realpolitik*, while basing his argument on a series of almost metaphysical presuppositions about the Romanian nation's essence and mission.

Despite their political differences, Liberal discourse on Dobrogea following the Berlin Congress did not differ significantly from that of Eminescu. The most important discursive shift was the internal evolution of the official view discussed above. An articulate state perspective on Dobrogea crystallized during the debates on the provisions of the Berlin Congress in the Romanian Parliament at the end of September 1878. Brătianu and Kogălniceanu presented their case as a response to the recriminations of the Conservative opposition and the accusations of the dissident Liberal faction headed by D. A. Sturdza. Aside from recycling the argument of European interest on the Lower Danube that caused the Great Powers to compromise on Dobrogea's incorporation into Romania, both politicians agreed on a set of advantages that the region conferred on Romania. Among these benefits, the most important was Dobrogea's strategic value in comparison to Bessarabia. Thus, Dobrogea provided not only a "gate through which we enter into direct contact with the entire world and with the West,"¹¹³ but also a breach in the "Slavic wall" that would surround the Romanian nation in case it did not take advantage of this commercial and territorial outlet to the sea. The image of Dobrogea evolved from the idea of a dangerous "Trojan horse" that could subvert Romanian-Bulgarian relations in the future into a bulwark against Slavic "expansionism."¹¹⁴

Another strategic advantage that Prime Minister Brătianu emphasized were the natural defenses that buttressed Romanian control over this region in comparison to Bessarabia: "Dobrogea is obviously endowed with a much better natural defense against all invasions than Bessarabia. Consequently, if you say that we cannot defend the freedom of the Danube without possessing Bessarabia, which is much easier to conquer, how can you claim that we cannot protect this freedom by having Dobrogea?"¹¹⁵ Brătianu did

¹¹³ N. Georgescu-Tistu, ed., *I. C. Brătianu: Acte și cuvântări* [I. C. Brătianu: Documents and speeches], vol. 4 (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1932), 103–4, 122.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 121. Brătianu reinforced his point by stating that "it is incontestable that the Bessarabia that we lose has no boundaries that could be defended . . . against an invasion, that it is an open field impossible to protect," 121.

not omit the historical argument from his presentation, though it was subordinate to more pragmatic considerations. The historical priority of the Romanians in the region was an additional factor that delegitimized any serious Bulgarian irredentist claims. Moreover, Brătianu made a revealing comparison between the Bulgarians from Dobrogea and those from Bessarabia. The latter appeared both more numerous and more articulate and thus represented a potentially greater danger for the homogeneity of the Romanian nation. Thus, Brătianu appeased his colleagues' fears about the local population's active resistance.¹¹⁶

In a similar intervention in the Senate, Kogălniceanu concentrated mostly on the material and economic advantages that the annexation of the new province would bring. He emphasized the fertility of the province's soil—in stark contrast to his earlier vision of a “marshy and unhealthy desert”—and he rejected D. A. Sturdza's assertion that Dobrogea was a “nest of fevers.” This epidemiological aspect is rather important since it directly referred to the degree of cultivation that the newly acquired territory had achieved. In this context, Kogălniceanu invoked the example of the “Tatar agriculturalists” already used by Eminescu and spoke about the “rare energy” that these atypical “orientals” displayed in transforming Dobrogea's “virgin land” into cultivated soil.¹¹⁷ Dobrogea's civilization was further demonstrated by the economic productivity of the land and the minimal efforts and financial expenses that the Romanian government would have to invest in its further development.¹¹⁸

All of these material considerations were subsumed, however, under Romania's mission to turn Dobrogea into a “truly Romanian country” by fulfilling the larger role bestowed upon it by the Great Powers as the guardian of the Lower Danube. Dobrogea's integration into Romania was rhetorically expressed through the language of national vitality. This region became not only moral compensation for the loss of Bessarabia, but the preferred exhibition space for displaying Romania's national vigor. Brătianu put it the following way: “It has been said . . . that in case we take Dobrogea, we will not be able to transform it into our own land [*pământ al nostru*]. But these . . . doubts can only arise in the mind of those who do not have faith in the vitality and the nature of the Romanian nation.”¹¹⁹ The same national framework informed Brătianu's appeal to the “bravery

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 124.

¹¹⁷ Kogălniceanu, *Discursuri parlamentare*, 139–40.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 141. Repeating Brătianu's stance almost verbatim, Kogălniceanu insisted that Dobrogea represented “a country given to us by Europe, a country that places us in contact with Western Europe, that from the first day secures commercial advantages for us,” 141.

¹¹⁹ Georgescu-Tistu, *I. C. Brătianu: Acte și cuvântări*, 103.

of the Romanians,” who “will know how to create a free Romanian [land] from a country that had belonged to our ancestors, from a rich country that secures for us the mouths of the Danube.”¹²⁰ The same symbolic appropriation of Dobrogea (prefiguring its actual integration) was expressed in more eloquent terms by Kogălniceanu: “I believe that what we have to do in this situation is to submit to Europe’s decision: to take Dobrogea, to rule it well, to make it truly ours [*să o facem a noastră*], to make it one with Romania’s body, to make it the heritage [*patrimoniul*] of our children. From the first day, let us prove to Europe that we take it for [all the] Romanians and that we do not intend to sell it to the Bulgarians.”¹²¹ Thus, Dobrogea became not only a suitable replacement for Bessarabia as an element of Romanian national discourse, but also proved to be a welcome substitute for nation-building in practical terms. Aside from the diplomatic events that determined the territorial exchange, Dobrogea served as appropriate moral compensation for the damage inflicted on Romania’s national prestige by the loss of Southern Bessarabia. The official stance proved extremely flexible in achieving this symbolic transfer and endowing the previously neglected region with a sense of national destiny. More importantly, the tangible success achieved by merging Dobrogea with the rest of the country secured its place on Romanians’ mental map in a way that Southern Bessarabia and Bessarabia as a whole never came close to achieving before World War I.

Romania and the Russian Empire completed the formal transfer of power by December 1878; however, the Romanian Parliament symbolically never gave its official consent to the cession of the Bessarabian districts in a separate act. Former Romanian Bessarabia (reunited as one district under Russian administration with its center in Ismail) retained its peculiar position within the structure of the Russian Empire and was governed internally according to old Romanian laws and a communal administration and judiciary based on the French-inspired model. The administrative and judicial reforms undertaken in the 1860s were never applied to the Ismail district, which remained an awkward reminder of a nationalizing state’s agenda in a slowly evolving imperial framework. Despite the intense debates raging until World War I about the necessity of harmonizing the administration of the Ismail district with the rest of the empire, no practical steps were ever taken. Some of the more insecure local Russian officials even voiced their concerns about the possibility of the region becoming estranged from the empire’s wider economic and cultural sphere due to its orientation toward Romania. Though these fears proved to be unfounded, the loyalty of the local inhabitants remained a matter of contention much

¹²⁰ Ibid., 124.

¹²¹ Kogălniceanu, *Discursuri parlamentare*, 142.

more so than before 1856. The contested character of this strip of land thus spilled over from the realm of discourse, rhetoric, and representation into the more complex world of reality.¹²²

In the Romanian case, the dilemma of choosing between the demands of realpolitik and the rhetorical flourishes of national discourse provided the framework for the internal political debate sparked by the provisions of the Berlin Treaty. While the Conservative opposition emphasized the moral impossibility of accepting the “mutilation of the national body” under any circumstances, the government defended its realpolitik approach—best exemplified by Prime Minister Brătianu’s declaration that “the country should have enough reason and enough patriotism to submit itself to Europe’s will.”¹²³ This stance was part of Romania’s dual defensive strategy toward Russia and the other Great Powers assembled at the Berlin Congress. The Romanian prime minister again explained this in unambiguous terms during the parliamentary debates: “To Russia we presented [our case at the Congress] by means of invoking our rights [over Bessarabia] *ab antiquo*; we told her [diplomats]: Bessarabia was never yours, but ours, and you took it from us without any legal basis; [you did this] before as you are doing it now, by breaking the formal arrangement that you have agreed to; whereas we told Europe that it is in Europe’s interest that Bessarabia remain in our hands.”¹²⁴

However, the fault line between the two rhetorical strategies was not one of Conservative versus Liberal political factions. National discourse was divided internally and was expressed through the oscillation between the trope of national dignity and realpolitik. The reactive nature of the Romanian position, as well as its adaptation to different audiences, also contributed to its unstable character. The most important conceptual shift in the Russian-Romanian controversy was the idea of Southern Bessarabia (where Romanians were a minority) as an integral part of Romanian national space. Similarly, analyzing the shifting discourses on the relative importance of Southern Bessarabia and Dobrogea provides an illuminating example of the ambiguities and dilemmas of Romanian national discourse. It also points to the varied and sometimes ingenious solutions that the Romanian government and intellectuals devised to overcome these ambiguities and dilemmas.

¹²² As illustrated, for example, by the rules regulating the transfer from the Romanian to the Russian legal regime in the field of civil and criminal justice: “*Pravila, podlezhashchie sobliudeniiu pri rassmotrenii ugovnykh i grazhdanskikh del, voznikshikh pri Rumynskom pravitel’sve v prisoedinennoi k Rossii po Berlin-skomu traktatu chasti Bessarabii.*” See ANRM, fond 2, op. 1, d. 8465.

¹²³ Georgescu-Tistu, *Ion C. Brătianu: Acte și cuvântări*, 115.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 120.

Southern Bessarabia in Russian Imperial Discourse after 1878: Visions of Otherness and Institutional Transfers

Rather than become locked in antagonistic relations with Romania, the Russian administration in Bessarabia proved flexible enough to accommodate several foreign models that preserved a certain degree of institutional diversity within the region throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Such examples are, understandably, more difficult to identify in the second half of the nineteenth century when the standardizing drive of the Great Reforms as well as the internal social dynamics in Bessarabia prevented the emergence of exceptional administrative or institutional arrangements in the area. International diplomacy, however, was responsible for introducing the legal framework of an emerging nation-state into an imperial context ill-suited to such unwelcome exceptions. Still, contrary to the expectations of many high-ranking Russian observers, this framework proved resilient enough to endure for forty years, withstanding all attempts to streamline it according to empire-wide standards. In the following pages, I will discuss the case of the Ismail district, which is a rare example of the transfer of national administrative practices into a multiethnic empire.

The territory in question comprised the southwesternmost part of the Bessarabian province (within its 1812 borders) and roughly coincided with the space between the Danube and the Black Sea, with a total surface area of roughly 9,000 km². Following the Crimean War, this district, along with the Danube Delta, was ceded for purely strategic reasons to the Moldavian Principality, at that time an autonomous part of the Ottoman Empire, and placed under the collective guarantee of the victorious allies by the Paris Treaty of 1856. Both Russian and Romanian elites were acutely aware that the border rectification in Bessarabia was due to the pragmatic calculations of international diplomacy and that the durability of the new situation was subject to fluctuations in power within the European state system. Moreover, the partial border change did not seem to satisfy anyone. Two prominent Romanian intellectuals were rather reserved in assessing the benefits of the territory's inclusion within Moldavia. They claimed that far from redressing the "injustice" of 1812, the provisions of the Paris Treaty only gave a veneer of European legality to Russia's control over the rest of Bessarabia.¹²⁵ The pragmatic dimensions of the Russian Empire's strategic retreat were no less obvious to a Romanian politician twenty years later, when the territorial settlement was revised: "Why was [Southern] Bessara-

¹²⁵ Dinu Poștarencu, "Aspecte privind retrocedarea Sudului Basarabiei către Principatul Moldovei la 1856–1857" [Some aspects concerning the return of Southern Bessarabia to the Moldavian Principality in 1856–1857], *Destin Românesc*, no. 2 (1999): 75.

bia given to us? Because we claimed it? Because Europe wanted to do us a favor? Because we descend from the Emperor Trajan? Far from it! Bessarabia was given to us in 1856 because Europe's Great Powers thought that it was in Europe's best interest to drive Russia from the Danube."¹²⁶ This pragmatic aspect is important to note because the perception of insecurity had a direct impact on the nationalizing drive of the emerging Romanian state.

In retrospect, the efficacy of Romanian policy in Southern Bessarabia was questioned by several Russian writers and officials. While it is difficult, if not impossible, to assess its results in objective terms, the Russian stance on the Romanian administration's practices clearly tended to minimize any influence the Romanian government might have exerted on local conditions. Thus, in an essay written twenty years after this region's reintegration into the empire (explicitly commemorating this event), a Russian author argued:

The Romanian government understood that this land, severed from Russia by virtue of political calculations, but acquired with Russian blood, populated and organized through the efforts of the Russian government, and also constituting, through its geographical position and the ethnographic makeup of its population, a natural part of Russian Bessarabia, will always gravitate toward Russia and will sooner or later return within its borders. Therefore, the Romanians always regarded their possession of Southern Bessarabia as a temporary dominion, as a sort of lease, and acted according to the following rule: *take as much as you can, give as little as you can*. Their attitude toward the interests of this land was limited exclusively to fiscal matters and to [the profit of] state officials.¹²⁷

Russian authors and officials naturally leveled their criticism at the intrusive practices of the nationalizing Romanian state. In fact, the Russian position was ambiguous: although it pointed to the Romanian authorities' meager achievements in matters related to the local population's welfare,¹²⁸ it also emphasized the constant pressure and even the violence of the local administration, thus constructing an image of misgovernance in stark contrast to the benevolent attitude of the Russian authorities. By engaging in a virtual dialogue with the Romanian government's claims to have educated local inhabitants,¹²⁹ Russian writers were also attacking depictions of the

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ S. Davidovich, "Vossoedinennaia Bessarabiia" [Re-united Bessarabia], in *Zhivopisnaia Rossiia* [Picturesque Russia], vol. 5, part II (Moscow, 1898), 173.

¹²⁸ The author quoted above also remarked that "the twenty-two-year-long Romanian domination can hardly be described as very beneficial for this part of Bessarabia," *ibid.*

¹²⁹ This motive is not entirely absent even in contemporary Romanian historiography. For an illustrative example, see Elena Siupiur, "Pătrunderea instituțiilor

imperial model as lacking bureaucratic rationality and quality of governance. Undermining the image of an orderly and democratic political system in Romania, Russian discourse insisted that the Romanian administration failed even in its most basic tasks of guaranteeing citizens' security and respecting the rights of the region's multiethnic population. In fact, the argument amounted to a vision of "mock constitutionalism" that was meant to underscore the positive features of Russian policy in the area.¹³⁰ Moreover, the assimilatory potential of the Romanian state was questioned despite the recognition of certain "nationalizing tendencies."¹³¹ This image of a weak state dominated by a predatory bureaucracy and exhibiting only the superficial features of a modern polity was the product of long-held stereotypes that blamed the Romanian elite for slavishly imitating Western models and losing its connection to the "people."¹³² At the same time, it was also a self-serving strategy aimed at discrediting the assumption of a direct correlation between the accelerated pace of modernization and the existence of a formally pluralistic political system.

Did this negative evaluation of Romanian nation-building efforts necessarily entail a total rejection of the institutional and administrative framework devised by this emerging nation-state? Certainly not. On the contrary, the Russian authorities took advantage of the Romanian model of administrative uniformization and used it for their own purposes. Before exploring this aspect, I will briefly examine the concrete manifestations of a nationalizing agenda in Southern Bessarabia during its two decades as part of Romania. The challenge of multiethnicity undoubtedly played a central role in the process of integrating the newly acquired region after 1856. This district also had an exceptional administrative status within the Russian Empire, which was due to the existence of a separate territorial unit for the city of Ismail (*Izmail'skoe gradonachal'stvo*) and to the privileged status of the Bulgarian colonies, which enjoyed a degree of self-government and were supervised by a special colonial administration based in the city of Bolgrad. These institutional irregularities hardly fit the aims of Romania's centralizing bureaucracy. Immediately after the annexation of Southern Bessarabia to Moldavia, certain Romanian public figures and even occasional travelers

moderne românești în Sudul Basarabiei după Războiul Crimeii (1856–1878)" [The penetration of modern Romanian institutions into Southern Bessarabia after the Crimean War], *Destin Românesc*, no. 4 (1996): 35–44.

¹³⁰ Davidovich, "Vossoedinennaia Bessarabiia," 173, 176.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹³² Such evaluations, occasionally amounting to a virulent critique of the Romanian intelligentsia, can be found, for example, in F. F. Vigel's memoirs: *Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Zakharov, 2003), 1060–63, or, in a slightly less accusatory vein, in the book written by V. Kel'siev, *Galichina i Moldaviia: Putevye pis'ma* [Galicia and Moldavia: Travel letters] (St. Petersburg: V. Golovin, 1868).

expressed their dismay at the extensive privileges the Bulgarian colonists enjoyed. The nationalizing overtones of such pronouncements were barely concealed: "The Romanian government cannot support such privileges, which have as their goal the development of a race that could counter-balance our national element. In other words, these [Bulgarian] foreigners should merge into the Romanian element since their destiny is now connected to our land."¹³³ Such observations did not remain confined to the rhetorical sphere, but were gradually becoming guiding principles of state policy along with the consolidation of Romanian institutions. The Romanian government thus appeared to pursue a rather coherent nationalizing agenda in the region despite the skeptical assessments of certain Russian observers and commentators. The most persistent legacy in this regard was represented by the institutional peculiarity of the Ismail district after its reincorporation into the Russian Empire in 1878.

This nationalizing policy did not necessarily amount to a concerted strategy of linguistic or cultural assimilation, however. The non-Romanian (especially Bulgarian) population was in fact given considerable leverage in the educational and cultural spheres, resulting in the opening of a Bulgarian central school in Bolgrad and the burgeoning activity of the press and various cultural associations. Southern Bessarabia also became an important center for Bulgarian émigré political organizations and arguably an important recruitment pool for the future elite of the Bulgarian state after 1878.¹³⁴ However, little institutional autonomy was tolerated, especially after the new government of the United Principalities under Alexandru Ioan Cuza introduced radical centralizing and reformist policies in the early 1860s. Measures such as the liquidation of the separate administration of the colonies and the imposition of general military service (completely at odds with the colonists' previous status) were applied swiftly despite the local population's active resistance.¹³⁵ The political restructuring signaled by these policies was completed following the introduction of the new Civil Code in 1865 (explicitly modeled on the Code Napoleon) and especially after the adoption of the 1866 Constitution, which instituted a new administrative (communal) structure and deprived the three Southern Bessarabian districts of the last traces of their administrative peculiarity. In this sense, the standardizing agenda of the Romanian government proved to be quite successful, and this success partly explains the persistence of this structure after 1878.

¹³³ G. Sion, *Suvenire de călătorie în Basarabia meridională* [Memoirs of a trip to Southern Bessarabia] (Bucharest, 1857), 78.

¹³⁴ Siupiu, "Pătrunderea instituțiilor moderne românești," 42–43.

¹³⁵ The resistance of the Bulgarian colonists and its suppression is described in Davidovich, "Vossoedinennaia Bessarabiia," 174–75.

The nation-building activities of the Romanian government were most obvious in the educational sphere—for example, the Romanian language became a compulsory subject in schools at all levels—and especially in the realm of religion. The Church was conceived as an effective instrument for inculcating Romanian national values among a multiethnic population and was therefore subordinated to the national interest. As a concrete manifestation of this policy, a new Bishopric of the Lower Danube (based in Ismail) was established in 1864. The main aim of the new eparchy was to “Romanianize, ceaselessly and every day, Bessarabia’s Church, which can be achieved only through the direct and national guidance of the material and spiritual interests of that region’s Church.”¹³⁶ In a similar vein, the same author stated that “the aim of the creation of the Bishopric of the Lower Danube was twofold: to stir up and develop Orthodox religious feelings within the people and to identify the heterogeneous elements of Lower Bessarabia with the ideals of Romanian nationalism.”¹³⁷ Another Romanian author, writing immediately after the area came under Romanian control, decried Russia’s aim of “de-nationalizing” the local population and “introducing the Slavic element through schools and the Church,” but he also “could not disapprove of such a policy: had we been Russians, we would also have contributed to this grand undertaking.”¹³⁸ In other words, Russia’s logic was at least understandable, if not commendable, and the author did not hesitate to advocate such a policy when addressing his educated Romanian audience.

Despite this apparently straightforward conclusion, the discourse promoted by the members of the clergy, even if saddled with national elements, cannot be reduced to a purely nationalizing agenda. Due to its institutional structure and to its late acceptance of the rhetoric and substance of nationalist claims, the Orthodox Church occupied a shifting and complex position in the context of the growing nationalizing tendencies of the nineteenth century. Though Russia and Romania both belonged to the Orthodox religious community, this commonality did not disguise the deep structural differences between the two churches, nor the fact that they were engaged in symbolic and canonical competition over Bessarabia. It is quite difficult to develop a clear picture of the Russian ecclesiastical establish-

¹³⁶ M. Pacu, “Amintiri bisericești și culturale din Basarabia Sudică sub cărmuirea română din 1857–1878” [Church-related and cultural memories from Southern Bessarabia under Romanian rule during 1857–1878], *Revista Societății Istorico-Arheologice Bisericești din Chișinău* 19 (1929): 379–92, here 382.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 383. Pacu also called the Episcopal palace erected in Ismail “the most significant *national* monument of this city and of all Southern Bessarabia” under the Romanian government, 384.

¹³⁸ Sion, *Suvenire de călătorie în Basarabia meridională*, 41.

ment's stance on the "nationalities problem," and the "Bessarabian question" in particular, which remained marginal in contemporary debates and rarely impinged on the sphere of practical policy. In this case, however, the Russian Orthodox Church could function at two levels, simultaneously producing and leveling the cultural distance between Russia and Romania. Russian officials and the Orthodox Church hierarchy perceived the modernizing vision advanced by Romanian nation-building elites as a borrowed project founded upon the blind and uncritical imitation of the Western (mainly French) model. From the Russian perspective, the final result of this unnatural evolution was the gradual but increasingly obvious distance of the elites from the roots of Romanian national life that amounted to the subversion of Orthodoxy.

For example, this dark vision of the emerging Romanian nation-state and its future tendencies underpins the work of the Bessarabian-born Russian bishop, Arsenii Stadnitskii, one of the few authors interested in and knowledgeable about Romanian Church history and Russian-Romanian ecclesiastical relations. Reflecting on the post-1848 Western influences within the Romanian Orthodox Church and wider society, Stadnitskii was one of the most consistent (and vehement) critics of the Romanian vision of modernity. What follows is the Russian prelate's opinion about the modernizing efforts of the "forty-eighters" and the Romanian nation-building project more generally:

The spiritual renaissance of the Romanian people [*narodnosti*], displaying itself under the influence of Western European civilization, . . . gradually started to follow an increasingly one-sided direction, a direction contrary to the historical structures of the life of the Romanian people. The Romanians' renaissance took place at the same time as their adoption of French culture . . . Taking into account the Romanians' total lack of preparedness for assimilating and adequately perceiving the fruits of European culture, the latter only poisoned their souls and, displacing them from the soil of their historical customs, guided them toward the path of slavishly imitating the non-Orthodox West, which was alien to them not only because of its faith, but also because of its way of life. The consequence of this passion for the West was a growing hostility toward the peoples of the non-Latin race, and first of all toward the Greeks.¹³⁹

Unsurprisingly, Stadnitskii takes a similarly strong position with regard to the evolution of Russian-Romanian relations in the nineteenth century, identifying the same scapegoat for their gradual deterioration: the increasing Westernization of Romanian society. In this respect, however, he di-

¹³⁹ Arsenii (Stadnitskii), *Issledovaniia i monografii po istorii moldavskoi tserkvi* [Studies and monographs on Moldavian Church history] (St. Petersburg: Vaisberg i Gerivunin, 1904), 388.

rectly condemns Romanian nationalism, which he finds especially dangerous. His general anti-modernism is reinforced by the customary trope of Russia's civilizing mission in the Balkans. The resulting vision is rather coherent: "Following the same principle of a narrowly nationalist orientation under the influence of the 'enlightened West,' the initiators of the 'renaissance' started to display a fiercely inimical attitude toward Russia as well, since it represented Orthodoxy, which they so abhorred." Consequently, Russia was no longer perceived as the Romanians' "historical protector and liberator from Turkish servitude"; instead, in line with the new national vocabulary, but deeply opposed to Stadnitskii's traditionalist ideology, Russia was seen as a "dangerous enemy for the Romanians' national existence."¹⁴⁰ In a following passage, the "forty-eighters" are accused of "chauvinism" and fomenting hostility toward Orthodoxy: "And thus, this national adversity toward Greeks and Russians is soon transformed into a pathological hatred for Orthodoxy, for the same Orthodoxy that represents the historical religion of the Romanian people that had educated so many previous generations and had rendered enormous services to the Romanian nationality, saving it, more than once, from subjugation either by the Turks or by the West."¹⁴¹ The role of clergy-generated discourse in the development of mutual Russian and Romanian perceptions is often underestimated, not least because of the excessive focus on the diplomatic aspects of the "Bessarabian question." The different levels of this discourse—for example, the purported role of "Catholic propaganda" in Romania or the perceived connection between the foreign prince installed in 1866 and Romania's drift from the Orthodox world—contributed to the consolidation of the image of the Romanian nation-state in Russian writings of this period. This framework also structured, however indirectly, the possibilities for political action, especially during periods of heightened symbolic tension, such as 1878 and immediately afterwards.

Beyond the bureaucratic rationalism of some Russian officials that will be explored below, the discourse originating within the Church provides an interesting and even surprising perspective on the construction or subversion of cultural distance and certain rhetorical strategies devised to reclaim Bessarabia on behalf of the imperial center. I will illustrate this point by briefly discussing a text produced by a prominent figure otherwise notorious for his active and effective policy of Russification within the Bessarabian Church—the Bishop of Kishinev and Hotin, Pavel Lebedev (1871–1882). Given his official position as head of the Bessarabian Church, he was actively involved in the symbolic ceremonies marking the official transfer of the three Southern Bessarabian districts to the Russian Empire in

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 388–89.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 389.

October 1878. The day after the transfer of sovereignty to Russia on October 10, 1878, Bishop Lebedev held a solemn sermon in the Ismail Cathedral. The text of the sermon, published shortly thereafter under the title "Word to the Faithful," not only emphasized the definitive "spiritual reintegration" of Southern Bessarabia into the canonical sphere of the Russian Orthodox Church, but also developed a much more complex set of arguments meant to convey the region's belonging to Russia. These arguments are a curious blend of traditional Orthodox universalism couched in a nationalizing vocabulary, thus marking a kind of transitional period. The spatial references and the organicist rhetoric used by the bishop are especially noteworthy, and the sermon is remarkable due to its frequent use of proto-geopolitical considerations in a context seemingly inappropriate for such musings.

Thus, Southern Bessarabia is presented as a "living member of [the body of] the Russian people," while the Danube is construed as an almost sacred space for Russia, as a "river of our native songs, just like the Volga and the Don."¹⁴² Southern Bessarabia is thus clearly associated with Russian *national* space, not only with the broader imperial realm. The invocation of the region's ethnic composition explicitly alludes to this aspect. In the bishop's view, Bessarabia is "populated by Russian people [*russskimi liud'mi*] and the Slavic Bulgarians."¹⁴³ Bessarabia's borders are interpreted almost ontologically: the reintegration of the three districts into the empire amounts to "Bessarabia's restoration within its natural frontiers," whereas the former Russian-Romanian boundary is depicted as "imagined rather than real," in obvious contrast to the organic territorial unity of the Bessarabian region.¹⁴⁴ Adhering to a providential understanding of Russia's recent expansion into Central Asia, he presents this undertaking as "divine compensation" for the losses suffered on the Danube after the Crimean War. Moreover, Russian success in Central Asia appears as a reward in the constant struggle against the Russian Empire's unrelenting geopolitical foe, Great Britain, which "is ready to annihilate us, to wipe us off the face of the earth."¹⁴⁵

At the same time, the bishop's attitude toward the former Romanian administration and the Romanian people is ambivalent. If the transfer of ecclesiastical jurisdiction was perceived in neutral terms (the former Romanian Bishop of Ismail, Melchisedec, attended the ceremony in the cathe-

¹⁴² Bishop Pavel Lebedev, *Slovo, proiznesennoe preosviashchennym Pavlom, episkopom Kishinevskim i Hotinskim* [A sermon held by Pavel, Bishop of Kishinev and Hotin] (Kishinev: Eparkhial'naia Tipografiia, 1878), 1.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* Spatial metaphors appear recurrently in this text.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

dral), the political aspect of Romanian domination is depicted as “alien” (*chuzhdaia vlast*), and the provisions of the Treaty of Paris are interpreted as a violent act against the integrity of the Russian national body. However, certain elements of the older vision of the Russian Empire as a protecting and civilizing power in the Balkan region are also discernible. These elements persisted longer in the traditional ecclesiastical milieus in comparison with the other dimensions of Russian discourse. Thus, although viewed as “alien,” the Romanian nation is also “friendly” (*druzhestvennyi*) toward Russia, and there are no direct accusations leveled against the former Romanian administration. Southern Bessarabia is also constructed as a sort of model province in a curious parallel to the intended role of Bessarabia as a whole immediately following its annexation in 1812. The territory reintegrated into Russia is perceived as an “outpost both of the Russian people and of the Russian Church, an outpost through which the Russian people and the Russian Church come into contact with neighboring peoples that have the same faith and the same blood as we do. You [Southern Bessarabia] will be the model by which they will form a judgment both of the Russian people and of the Russian Church.”¹⁴⁶ Finally, Russia’s purported mission to “defend and protect” the “lesser Christian peoples” of the Balkan region (including, of course, the Romanians) was forcefully reasserted.¹⁴⁷ This document represents a fascinating combination of traditional and modern topics and rhetorical devices, probably signaling the apex of Southern Bessarabia’s symbolic construction in Russian imperial discourse. The connection between the strategies of internal political legitimization and the foreign policy priorities of the Russian imperial regime is quite clearly revealed through this brief analysis of Bishop Pavel Lebedev’s text.

Following Southern Bessarabia’s reintegration into the Russian Empire in 1878, the three former districts were reorganized into a new administrative unit: the Ismail district. This territory preserved certain institutional and legislative peculiarities that transformed it into an anomaly in the Russian Empire during the period before World War I. The position of Russian officials toward the institutional aberration in the Ismail district was rather contradictory. Two opposing visions about the utility of preserving the territory’s institutional specificity were articulated. On the one hand, a tendency toward administrative unification and centralization, presupposing the immediate introduction of imperial legislation and the liquidation of Romanian institutions, was visible within the Ministry of Internal Affairs. On the other hand, a more flexible approach toward Romanian laws, reflecting a pragmatic and relatively tolerant attitude toward diversity on the

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 8–9.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 9.

empire's peripheries, was advocated by another part of the imperial bureaucracy. Ultimately, the argument for the greater efficiency and underlying rationality of the French model of local administration held sway over these circles.

Several attempts to revise the exceptional institutional structure of the district were undertaken before World War I, but to no avail. The post-Great Reform context and the uncertain situation of the local administration in the Russian Empire as a whole also must have deterred officials from solving the issue. This continued toleration of institutional diversity pointed to the variety of views held in the highest echelons of state power. The Russian bureaucracy was divided by conflicting interests and state-building aims, with various agencies competing for preeminence. While one might ascribe the case of Ismail and the debates surrounding it to institutional inertia, it appears that some imperial dignitaries held a favorable view of the experiment in Ismail. The Ismail anomaly shows how the functioning of the Russian state was in fact predicated upon a finely balanced system of factions and interest groups within which the autocrat performed the role of arbiter.¹⁴⁸ The loyalty of the local population remained uncertain, prompting the Russian authorities to act carefully in this sensitive region. Foreign policy concerns and the perceived threat of Romanian irredentism were significant enough to hamper the centralizing zeal of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in St. Petersburg.

The most serious discussions concerning different projects to revise the special status of the Ismail district took place on two occasions: first, immediately following the transfer of authority to the Russian Empire between 1879 and 1881; and second, during the first years of the twentieth century (1900–1901) when the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) came very close to prevailing over its opponents and imposing its view on the necessity to replace Romanian institutions with imperial equivalents. The ultimate failure of these attempts was due to a set of strong arguments put forward by the opponents of legislative uniformization. These arguments could be classified into three main categories: 1) the rational and modern nature of the Romanian administrative structure compared to the available Russian models; 2) tailored integration of the peripheries and the need to pursue a moderate course in relation to regional particularism, at least initially; and 3) sensitive foreign policy issues and the problem of Russia's image abroad (the loyalty of the local population remained the underlying issue in this context). One should emphasize that the dividing lines be-

¹⁴⁸ For an excellent analysis of this topic, see Alfred J. Rieber, "Interest-Group Politics in the Era of the Great Reforms," in *Russia's Great Reforms, 1855–1881*, ed. Ben Eklof, John Bushnell, and Larissa Zakharova (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 58–83.

tween the opponents and supporters of administrative uniformization adhered to institutional rather than spatial criteria. Thus, certain representatives of central institutions—in particular, the ministries of finance and justice—pursued the flexible approach of preserving local institutions in Southern Bessarabia, while MVD officials were fervent advocates of legislative unification.

The most clearly developed argument invoking the rationality and efficiency of the Romanian institutional model can be found in the “note” (in fact, an extensive and detailed analysis of Romanian institutions in Ismail) sent to the Ministry of Internal Affairs by the Bessarabian governor E. O. Iankovskii in 1881.¹⁴⁹ The governor explicitly emphasized in his report that “certain elements of social organization in Southern Bessarabia” introduced by the previous Romanian administration “*deserve exceptional attention*; these [aspects] mostly concern the communal organization and the system of equal taxation [of all citizens], without taking into account their social estate [*bessoslovnaia*].”¹⁵⁰ In fact, the governor argued for the efficiency of the Romanian administrative model in order to formulate a rather radical critique of the empire’s social system during that period, which he found outdated and ineffective in a modern world. As a result of his detailed analysis of the advantages inherent in Romanian institutions, Iankovskii concluded that “all these data concur in favor of the preservation of the recently reunited section as a separate [administrative] unit, at least until the revision of our legislative regulations concerning the tax system and the rural public administration.”¹⁵¹ Admitting, however, that the “superior interests of the state” might prompt the government to introduce Russian laws immediately and to abolish the Ismail district, dividing it between the neighboring districts, Iankovskii remained in favor of a flexible and careful strategy, asserting that “when it comes to the question of reforming this region [*uchastka*], it is necessary to act with particular caution, so that by smashing all the existing legal norms and replacing them with new regulations, some of which must be deemed less satisfying [than the current ones], we should not awaken among the inhabitants certain regrets concerning their separation from Romania.”¹⁵² Beyond this transparent hint at the need to cultivate the loyalty of the local population, it seems that the flexible position of a number of Bessarabian governors had an impact on the actions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, or, more precisely, on their lack of action. Ministry officials admitted as much twenty years later

¹⁴⁹ “Zapiska bessarabskogo gubernatora Iankovskogo ob ustroistve vossoedinennogo kraia,” s prilozheniiami za 1881 god // RGIA, fond 573, op. 21, d. 54.

¹⁵⁰ RGIA, fond 573, op. 21, d. 54, l. 72. Emphasis in original.

¹⁵¹ RGIA, fond 573, op. 21, d. 54, l. 75.

¹⁵² RGIA, fond 573, op. 21, d. 54, l. 84.

in 1901 when a special report filed by the institution stated that the governors' constant reluctance to permit any revisions of the Romanian institutional model influenced the position of the center. Both Iankovskii and his successor, A. P. Konstantinovich (1883–99), noted the “advantages” of Romanian communal organization in comparison with the Russian model of rural administration.¹⁵³

Although officials in the Ministry of Internal Affairs were obviously not persuaded by this kind of argumentation (neither in 1879–81, nor in 1900), the policy papers of the Ministry concerning Southern Bessarabia's integration into the empire occasionally featured pragmatic elements deriving from the impact of foreign policy. For example, in an explanatory note of the MVD dated March 15, 1879, and addressed to the minister of justice, arguing for the necessity of “immediately” introducing Russian laws into the region and insisting on the “functional equivalence” of Romanian and imperial Russian institutions, one finds the following passage:

There is no doubt whatsoever that, in light of the sincere feelings of approval displayed by the population of this territory toward its reunification with Russia, this population deserves particular attention from our Government. Moreover, taking into account that the foreign press, mostly hostile to Russia, attempts to present the future fate of this population following its merging with the rest of Bessarabia in the darkest colors, we can only conclude that, in this case, we should generally act with all possible caution and we should especially avoid any substantial violation of those rights and privileges that belonged to Bessarabia's population under the Romanian government.¹⁵⁴

Moreover, the minister of internal affairs, L. S. Makov, attempts to legitimize this attitude through the invocation of certain general principles of Russian policy implemented on the peripheries of the empire and therefore also applicable to the Bessarabian case:

The Russian Government was always guided by the same views also with regard to other territories and localities [*mestnostiam*] annexed to the Empire in times past—namely, the Baltic Provinces, the Kingdom of Poland, and even Bessarabia. Nowhere did it simultaneously dismantle the whole existing [order] in these territories and replace it with another regime unknown to the local population because such a strategy would have undoubtedly led to general confusion and to the discontent of the population, particularly if the new conditions had proven less satisfying than the previous ones.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ RGIA, fond 573, op. 21, d. 54, l. 160.

¹⁵⁴ RGIA, fond 1405, op. 77, d. 5920, 1879 (“Ob administrativnom ustroistve prisoedinennogo po Berlinskomu traktatu uchastka Bessarabii”), l. 15.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

Thus, Southern Bessarabia's reintegration should proceed "gradually," while the government carefully studied the "peculiarities and needs of the region" in order to later promote the necessary reforms more "firmly."¹⁵⁶ This perspective on the Ismail district proved to be too optimistic, however. Zealous officials in St. Petersburg ultimately succumbed to bureaucratic inertia as well as to the resistance of local elites in Southern Bessarabia and the reserved position of more conservative central institutions, most notably the Council of State.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs argued forcefully for centralization in a special report submitted to Emperor Alexander II in 1879. The document endorsed the introduction of the *zemstvo* system and a model of rural organization in the Ismail district similar to the rest of the empire.¹⁵⁷ At the same time, the ambiguity inherent in imperial policies in the borderlands and the internal contradictions of Russian legislation became clear in the explanation sent to St. Petersburg by the Bessarabian governor N. I. Shebeko regarding the preservation of Romanian laws in the recently reacquired territory:

The accession of this territory to Russia subjected it to the same Supreme Power, but does not entail as a consequence the unconditional or purported suppression of all the laws or institutions that had been functioning in this region before its accession to Russia, nor does it entail the [immediate] introduction of the laws or institutions that are currently enforced in the rest of the Empire. Thus, the Grand Duchy of Finland, the Kingdom of Poland, and other regions of the Russian Empire, being subject to the same Supreme Power, nevertheless had in the past and continue to have laws and institutions that differ from those in the rest of the Empire. The replacement of the existing order in the annexed territory, by virtue of the notion of the inviolability and firmness of the laws that protect the civil and social life of the population, cannot be taken for granted and is not an automatic consequence of the event of accession [to Russia].¹⁵⁸

Such a legalistic and seemingly modern interpretation of the institutional and legal integration of the borderlands seems to suggest that the Russian Empire continued to function even in this period as a state with multiple and overlapping jurisdictions—the only unifying principle being the extra-legal prerogatives of the monarch.¹⁵⁹ The same principle seemed to apply to

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ RGIA, fond 1405, op. 77, d. 5920, 1879, l. 137–38.

¹⁵⁸ RGIA, fond 1405, op. 77, d. 5920, 1879, l. 93.

¹⁵⁹ This impression is confirmed by Shebeko himself, who concludes his report by stating that only a direct order or decree of the tsar could alter the situation definitively. This order never came, despite the fact that Russian tsars were inclined to deal rapidly with the "Ismail anomaly." RGIA, fond 1405, op. 77, d. 5920, 1879, l. 93.

a special regulation detailing the minute procedures of the harmonization of the Russian and Romanian legal systems and emphasizing their compatibility. This document was issued in 1879 and was accompanied by an imperial decree.¹⁶⁰ The extent to which these regulations normalized the transfer of judicial authority and legislation from a national to an imperial context might seem surprising. The precedence of imperial law was naturally a basic condition of this transfer, but no radical break with the previous juridical regime is obvious either in the wording or the substance of the document. Far from following the logic of institutional incongruence, the smooth procedure of adjusting national legal principles to the Russian Empire pointed to state authorities' pragmatism. This tendency is proven by the considerable leverage that local authorities were granted in coordinating the harmonization of Romanian and imperial laws.¹⁶¹ Local elites generally played a central role in the transfer and adjustment process. In fact, the institutional continuity in Ismail cannot be explained without taking into account the continuity of the core elite group, which managed to secure its preeminence in local affairs under the imperial government.

However, some local officials did not hesitate to express their discontent and frustration with the persistence of Romanian laws and institutions seen as alien or outdated in Southern Bessarabia and pleaded for their liquidation. In 1884, in the context of these polemics, the acting governor-general of Odessa and New Russia, Khristofor von Roop, advanced a radically different perspective than the earlier one held by Governor Shebeko. In a report addressed directly to Alexander III, von Roop declares that the numerous complaints and petitions filed by the population of the new Ismail district are exaggerated since they are not confirmed by the emissaries sent to the region by von Roop himself or through his personal investigation he conducted in Bolgrad and Ismail. On the contrary, he emphasizes the progress that Russian administration has brought to the region and laments the persistence of Romanian laws and institutions:

Certain isolated abuses still occur here, but, in any case, the population is exposed to them to a lesser extent than under the Romanian government when money and protection represented overwhelming power, and the tribunals and the prosecutor's office were completely in the hands of the rich dominant class, which at present is losing its former hegemonic power. However, one cannot deny that Romanian communal laws, which were preserved there, today still offer pretexts for the local [*zemskimi*] committees' continuing exploitation of the

¹⁶⁰ "Pravila, podlezhashchie sobliudeniui pri rassmotreniiu ugovornykh i grazhdanskikh del, voznikshikh pri Rumynskom pravitel'stve v prisoedinennoi k Rossii po Berlinskomu traktatu chasti Bessarabii." See ANRM, fond 2, op. 1, l. 8465.

¹⁶¹ S. D. Urusov, *Zapiski gubernatora* [A governor's notes] (Chişinău: Litera, 2004), 206.

population, a fact which is on open display particularly in the Bolgrad Committee . . . In any case, almost seven years have passed from the moment that the region bordering on the Danube, which had been temporarily lost, returned to the bosom of the fatherland, and that is why the continuation of the current state of transition and uncertainty must no longer be tolerated, even if outstanding efforts and sacrifices will be necessary to reach this goal.¹⁶²

Tsar Alexander III fully endorsed this opinion and wrote the following note in the margins: "It is time to resolve [the issue] definitively."¹⁶³ Despite the tsar's resolution, "the issue" remained unresolved for the next three decades. The Ismail district entered World War I with the same uncertain and special status. Some Russian observers were even tempted to exaggerate the specter of Romanian irredentism in the region.

The ambiguity and contradictions that characterized the position of the Russian bureaucracy with regard to the "Ismail question" were also evident at a more personal level. A particularly relevant and interesting case is that of Prince S. D. Urusov, who was governor of Bessarabia between May 1903 and October 1904. Generally (and rightly) viewed at the time and by later historians as an official with liberal inclinations and as a rather informed critic of the Russifying policies of the imperial center, Urusov exhibited an inconsistent and self-contradictory attitude when articulating his opinions about the administrative anomaly in Southern Bessarabia. If in his memoirs, which were initially published in 1907 during a period of overt opposition toward the imperial government, Urusov's attitude is essentially neutral, in his official reports submitted to the Ministry of Internal Affairs the governor appears as a supporter of legal uniformity and the liquidation of remnants of the Romanian administration. The following passage shows Urusov's opinion concerning the situation of the Ismail district in 1903:

In the Bessarabian *guberniia* there also exists the Ismail district with significant land area and rich natural resources, which is composed of three [former] Romanian prefectures—Ismail, Bolgrad, and Cahul. For twenty-five years, the aforementioned district, now reunited with the Russian Empire, has been administered according to the old Romanian laws, currently being modified in Romania proper [Urusov means the 1865 Civil Code and the 1864 Law on Communal Administration] because they no longer correspond to the vital needs of the population. After frequently receiving petitions from the inhabitants of this district demanding the introduction of Russian institutions into this area, I attempted to form a picture about the vulnerable aspects of the order prevailing in the district, and I came to the conclusion that the main flaw is the lack of organized rural life due to imperfect communal administration . . . The

¹⁶² RGIA, fond 1405, op. 77, d. 5920, 1879, l. 111–12.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

district's towns are managed in a very satisfactory manner, but the quality and organization of rural life leaves much to be desired . . . The activity of the *guberniia's* administrative institutions has no bearing on the Ismail district, which is why the surveillance of the communal administrative boards, where numerous abuses have been discovered, is subverted . . . The aforementioned reasons, as well as the unwelcome separation (in the sense of a lack of state unity) of this part of Bessarabia bordering Romania, urgently require the swiftest possible introduction of Russian institutions into the Ismail district.¹⁶⁴

Despite his apparent preoccupation with the liquidation of the peculiarities of Southern Bessarabia, the governor's memoirs not only offer the reader an extended discussion of the Ismail district's communal structure according to Romanian legislation (without any pejorative language), but they also contain potentially subversive reflections on the possible future of this territory. Indeed, Urusov is rather critical of the integrative and centralizing projects promoted by the imperial government in St. Petersburg. The same official who advocated the immediate introduction of Russian laws in 1904 asserted the following only three years later:

The Ismail district, which was reincorporated into Russia in 1878 following the war with Turkey, occupies a completely peculiar position within Bessarabia . . . There were neither noble institutions, nor *zemstvos*, nor the [customary] *volost'* and rural administrations led by land captains [*zemskimi nachal'nikami*] in the Ismail district. Here, the Romanian communal structure was preserved. Every locality, either rural or urban, formed a separate commune, which comprised all the landowners and all the inhabitants of these localities without distinctions based on property, class, etc. The executive official [*organ*] of the commune, the mayor [*primar*], assisted by a twelve-member communal council, decided on all matters of self-government and fulfilled the same general state duties as those that are delegated to local institutions in Russia. The governor only rarely intervened in issues related to the local administration of the Ismail district . . . The governor inherited, in relation to the self-governing divisions of the district, the [former] functions of the royal power, while his superiors in St. Petersburg did not deal with Ismail at all and had only the vaguest notion [*samoe tumannoe predstavlenie*] about the functioning of the . . . district . . . Despite this, within the Ministry of Internal Affairs the preoccupation with introducing Russian institutions in Ismail constantly reemerged—including the land captains, the *volost'* system, the nobility, and the new *zemstvo*-urban regulations. However, the State Council always rejected these types of ministerial projects under the pre-

¹⁶⁴ RGIA, fond 1284, op. 194, d. 94, 1904 ("Otchet o sostoianii Bessarabskoi gubernii za 1903 g."), l. 11. The topic of the "administrative peculiarity of the Ismail district" also emerges in other reports of Bessarabian governors submitted to the tsar or the MVD in the early twentieth century, as, for example, in 1912: RGIA, fond 1284, op. 194, d. 116, 1912 ("Prilozhenie k otchetu Bessarabskogo gubernatora za 1912 g.").

text of insufficient explanation and the lack of serious arguments [*neobosnovanosti*] to support the idea of destroying the old local regime [*stroï*] for the sake of leveling the administration. The Ismail district remains to the present day an exception within the Russian district structure; it probably will have to wait for a general reform of our local administration, unless it is incorporated into Romania once again due to some kind of international arrangement. [Romania] extends its motherly embrace to [Ismail] from beyond the border river Prut.¹⁶⁵

Thus, a combination of indifference, bureaucratic inertia, and institutional rivalry, accompanied by a degree of pragmatism and toleration of administrative diversity, seem to be the main factors accounting for the institutional transfer and for the persistence of this anomaly in an increasingly hostile Russian environment as late as the first decade of the twentieth century. The example of Urusov, however, also points to the purely opportunistic and rhetorical character of the arguments for centralization, which operated within the complex universe of the politically correct vocabulary of the epoch (in its Russian imperial version). At the same time, both in his official position and in his private memoirs, Urusov clearly displayed sensitivity toward the uncertain status of the region from a geographical (and even geopolitical) point of view.

This is understandable since the Romanian factor became more and more significant in the first decade of the twentieth century when the problem of the loyalty of borderland populations became an obsession for some of the empire's leaders. The danger to imperial unity and regional loyalty inherent in the exceptional status of the Ismail district did not go unnoticed by more anxious Russian observers. Given the heated discussions on the necessity of introducing the Russian *zemstvo* institutions in the Western Borderlands during this period, the uncertain status of Southern Bessarabia became a serious concern for ruling elites. In the tense prewar context, such concerns signaled the growing insecurity of imperial rule over the borderlands. In a comprehensive report on the general situation in Bessarabia filed by a Russian counterintelligence officer of Bessarabian origin and sent to the head of the Police Department from Constantinople on February 19, 1914, the "Ismail issue" figured prominently. The report emphasized that:

The Ismail district of Bessarabia finds itself in a worse condition [compared to the rest]. [Here], since the time of its reincorporation into Russia, even the slightest sign of Russification is not visible, so much so that it seems that one is in Romania. This is caused not only by the recent inclusion of this land into Russia, but also by the local inhabitants' connections with the Romanians. [Thus,] almost all of the trade in agricultural products is oriented toward Ro-

¹⁶⁵ Urusov, *Zapiski gubernatora*, 206–7.

mania; the credit loans of small rural landowners are [provided by] Romanian banks due to the better conditions compared to the private Jewish banks of Southern Russia. [Another cause] is that, until the present time, Romanian local [*zemscoe*], urban, and rural regulations have been preserved.¹⁶⁶

Due partly to bureaucratic inertia and partly to arguments relating to the effectiveness of the district's Western-style institutions, the Ismail district preserved its exceptional character in Bessarabia and was repeatedly invoked as an example of Russian administrative rationality (or, conversely, carelessness). If in the early period after the region's reintegration into the empire the acceptance of the Romanian institutional model was regarded either as a temporary expedient or as an example of the imperial center's strategic flexibility, later, due to the growing nationalization of imperial discourse and policy, the relevance of the national factor assumed greater importance. The Ismail district thus became a potential target for Romanian irredentism, and its administrative uniqueness became increasingly awkward and questionable. However, the fact that this arrangement endured for nearly forty years suggests that even in the late Russian Empire, which was less tolerant of regional diversity, imperial officials were not averse to incorporating foreign models of governance. The survival of local elites and the relatively generous terms of their reintegration after 1878 played a large role in producing this outcome. The coexistence of a French-inspired, rational administrative structure with a multilayered Russian model of local governance in a remote corner of the empire demonstrates the flexibility of state authorities. This flexibility was also the result of inconsistent imperial policies, which lacked any common vision regarding the integration of the peripheries. The case of Southern Bessarabia also serves as a reminder that the empire's borderlands were privileged sites of administrative and social experimentation up until the demise of the imperial regime.

¹⁶⁶ Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), fond 529, op. 1, d. 26, ll. 9–11. Secret Report Nr. 39, February 19, 1914 (mistakenly dated 1913), here l. 11.

CHAPTER III

Rituals of Nation and Empire in Early Twentieth-Century Bessarabia: The Anniversary of 1912 and its Significance

Много камней драгоценных,
Переливами горя,
Блещут в царственной короне
Православного Царя!
И из них ты не последний,
Бессарабский чудный край,
Край приволья, изобилья,
Плодоноснейший наш край!
От турецкого засилья
Русью ты освобожден
И к семье ея народов
Незрывно приобщен.
В этом братском единеньи
Целый век уж миновал.
Ты, свободно развиваясь,
Русской житницею стал.
Процветай же бесконечно,
Небеса благодаря,
Под могучею рукою
Православного Царя!¹

In the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, the historiography of the “Bessarabian question” witnessed sudden upsurges that usually coincided with the anniversaries of Bessarabia’s incorporation into the Russian Empire in 1812.² While the ritualistic images conveyed on such occasions extolled the

¹ Poem by S. S. Orlov in N. V. Lashkov, ed., *Prazdnovanie Stoletiiia prisoedineniia Bessarabii k Rossiiskoi Imperii* [The celebration of the one-hundredth anniversary of Bessarabia’s incorporation into the Russian Empire] (Kishinev: Izd. Bessarabskogo Gubernskogo iubileinogo komiteta, 1914), 48. The poem extolls Bessarabia as a “jewel” in the Russian tsar’s crown. The province appears as a “land of freedom, land of plenty,” which was liberated by Russia from the “Turkish yoke” and became a part of the empire’s “family of peoples.” During the century of Russian rule Bessarabia purportedly turned into a “Russian breadbasket” that was to “flourish eternally” under the “mighty hand” of the “Orthodox Tsar.”

² Soviet historiography viewed 1812 as one of the “founding dates” of Soviet Moldavian statehood, as evidenced by the plethora of celebratory articles and books

quintessential Soviet myth of the “friendship of the peoples,” these images referred to an implicit symbolic heritage that went unacknowledged in customary Soviet celebratory rhetoric. The more benevolent attitude of official Soviet historiography toward certain aspects of the Russian imperial experience that emerged after World War II did not lead to a similar reevaluation of the rituals of empire. Paradoxically, Soviet commemorations of the events of 1812 shared common features with earlier imperial ceremonies. This commonality stemmed from the main purpose of such ceremonies in both contexts: to affirm the definitive inclusion of Bessarabia within the symbolic space of the polity ruled from St. Petersburg or Moscow. Despite marked differences in the rhetorical devices used and their explicit, symbolic implications, the continuity of rituals of inclusion and the prominent role they played in the appropriation of the Bessarabian borderland is striking.

Before describing the ceremonies performed throughout Bessarabia on May 16, 1912, a sketch of the political situation at the local level is necessary. By the early twentieth century, the impact of mass politics was obvious throughout the Russian Empire. Bessarabia was no exception to this tendency, though the situation there was complicated by several factors. Even prior to the onset of the 1905 Revolution, which customarily marks the divide between pre-modern and modern forms of political action in Bessarabia, two events that occurred in the first years of the twentieth century put this borderland province of southwestern Russia on the map of imperial politics. The first incident was the young Bessarabian intelligentsia’s attempt at self-organization for collective political action. The initial stage of political mobilization took place outside Bessarabia among the Bessarabian-born students at Dorpat (Iur’ev) University³. The emergence and goals of this organization are of only marginal importance here. Apparently, the members of this student society had a twofold goal. First, they aimed to smuggle banned literature from Romania into the Russian Empire, though from the official papers of the Department of Police—a special division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in charge of surveillance—it is not clear to what extent the Dorpat students were linked to populist circles inside or outside Bessarabia. Second, the private correspondence of the “Dorpat Society’s” members reveals the possibility of a nationalizing agenda. In a confidential report sent to the Department of Police in St. Petersburg dated January 25, 1903, a police agent states that “in several letters written on the twelfth of the current month of January from Kishi-

issued by local historians. Even a cursory glance at Soviet works reveals the political implications of these writings.

³ Dorpat (Iur’ev in Russian) was the early twentieth-century name of present-day Tartu in Estonia.

nev, a certain Andrei asks Georgii Madan [a prominent Bessarabian émigré to Romania], who currently resides in Bucharest and who is well-known to the Department of Police, to send various patriotic Romanian books” to several people in Dorpat and Bessarabia who would later pass them on to active members of the “Dorpat society.”⁴ However, this instance of active collaboration between Bessarabian émigrés in Romania and Bessarabian students at Russian universities should not be viewed through the lens of the nationalizing narrative of Romanian historiography. The relevance of this association stems from its role as an initial step in the process of articulating an oppositional discourse within the emerging stratum of Bessarabian intellectuals.

The second major turning point in the interplay between official discourse and its actual impact on local politics in the late Russian Empire was the widely publicized Kishinev pogrom of 1903. The debates surrounding the circumstances, leading actors, and consequences of the violent events that occurred in Kishinev reveal the profound rifts that existed within the Russian bureaucracy, and between certain elements of the bureaucracy and the imperial court, regarding the best course of action in the empire’s multiethnic borderlands. The extent of the Russian government’s involvement in and even tacit support for the April pogrom quickly became the central issue of the official investigation, thus obfuscating the events themselves. Liberal criticism of the government’s policy in connection with the Bessarabian pogrom focused on two fundamental issues: first, the role of the local anti-Semitic press, represented primarily by the publications directed or supported by the notorious journalist and writer Pavel Krushevan; and second, the signals coming from the central authorities that tolerated or even actively encouraged anti-Jewish (and, more generally, anti-alien) attitudes. One of the most poignant critiques of imperial policies in the borderlands came from the Bessarabian governor, Prince S. D. Urusov, a liberal state official who later served as a deputy in the First Duma.

Appointed to Bessarabia in order to alleviate the simmering tensions that remained in the wake of the pogrom and to contribute to the official investigation, Urusov left one of the most comprehensive accounts of the local political environment in Bessarabia in the first years of the twentieth century. According to his perspective, the central government was to blame for the atmosphere that made the massive outbreak of anti-Jewish violence possible: “I strongly persist in emphasizing this characteristic feature of the Kishinev pogrom. The prevailing reason for the actions of the pogrom participants was neither hatred, nor vengeance. [It was] the performance of certain actions that, following the opinion of certain people, contributed to the goals and objectives of the government. According to others, such ac-

⁴ GARF, fond 505, op. 1, d. 70, l. 28 verso.

tions were even officially sanctioned, and, finally, if one is to admit the explanations of popular wisdom, they represented the fulfillment of the tsar's command."⁵

Urusov's observations are an indicator of the profound incongruity between the legal political culture of moderate elements of the Russian public and the nationalizing drive of the dynasty that sought to reshape the basis for the legitimacy of the tsar's authority by emphasizing the direct and organic connection between the monarch and his subjects. As Richard Wortman has argued, "the narrative of a national monarchy . . . reduced the abstractions of state and power to personal representations of authority and subordination. The institutions of the bureaucracy in this framework were portrayed as a mere encumbrance, 'a dividing wall' [*sredostenie*] between tsar and people."⁶ The rejection of bureaucratic institutions as such and the attempt to forge a direct link with the "people" pushed the monarchy to encourage the political mobilization of conservative and monarchist elements. While relations between the imperial court and the "Black Hundred"⁷ organizations were never clear-cut or simple, their active participation in the ceremonies staged in February 1913 during the initial phase of the tricentennial celebration⁸ and the special "privilege[s] not granted to other political groups"⁹ that they enjoyed on this occasion pointed to the peculiarity of the "scenario of power" devised by Nicholas II. In fact, the tendency to abolish the "symbolic elevation" of the monarch or at least to transfer the focus of the monarchy's legitimacy to the mundane sphere of politics had important repercussions not only for the central bureaucracy, but also for the local administration. This overall context helps explain the increased complexity of administering multiethnic peripheries in an empire that perceived itself less as a supranational entity and more as a distinctly Russian polity.

The discrepancy between the legal-oriented consciousness of liberal officials and the tolerance or active encouragement of discriminatory policies promoted by radical local figures as well as government and court circles is a theme also present in Governor Urusov's work. In discussing the causes and repercussions of the 1903 pogrom, Urusov notes that

⁵ Urusov, *Zapiski gubernatora*, 132.

⁶ Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in the Russian Monarchy*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 448.

⁷ This was the colloquial designation of extreme right-wing monarchist organizations in the late Russian Empire. The most prominent among them was the Union of Russian People (*Soiuz Russkogo Naroda*).

⁸ This refers to the three-hundredth anniversary of the Romanov dynasty's reign, celebrated throughout the empire.

⁹ Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, 465.

the local common man could not fail to observe the impact of the benevolent views of the government [toward rightist public opinion] on the behavior and [political] program of those people who clad their activities in patriotic garb, trying everywhere to express their "Russian" spirit. The ugly manifestations of this spirit, which subsequently created the well-known organizations of "true Russian people," are common knowledge, while the involvement of many people with a dark past, a mean reputation, and a tainted consciousness in the ranks of these patriots have probably been noted by most of the unprejudiced men [in Russia].¹⁰

In a more accusatory vein, Urusov then asserts that "one cannot doubt that such sorts of people enjoyed a certain degree of protection from the government, which also perceived in them a 'healthy foundation,' a patriotic kernel of autocracy and of the Russian people's spirit [*narodnosti*]." ¹¹

Contrary to this vision of the government's partiality toward the "Russian element," the newly appointed governor (somewhat retrospectively) articulates a purely legal framework for managing the multiethnic provinces of the empire. Even if Urusov's conclusions applied primarily to the "Jewish problem"—one of the thorniest questions both in local Bessarabian and all-imperial politics in the first years of the twentieth century—his opinions allow one to assess the gap between the legal-rational tradition instilled in the Russian bureaucracy (especially after the Great Reforms) and the tendencies to restore arbitrary, "organic" autocratic rule during the reign of the last two Russian tsars. Urusov emphasizes: "I decided, first, that the existing laws limiting the rights of the Jews must be applied . . . in all cases, without any attenuating circumstances or misgivings, despite the opinion that was made known to me in Petersburg, according to which the regulations of May 3, 1882, proved to be a governmental error and did not reach their goal."¹² This respect for the letter of the law was proclaimed to be the guiding principle of Urusov's future governorship and was meant to eliminate any personal or extralegal elements from the exercise of his office. Far from endorsing the literal meaning of the euphemism "*guberniia's* chief" that was used to designate the governor's office in the late Russian Empire, Urusov rejected the intrusion of the Ministry of Internal Affairs into the governor's affairs (that was to be limited by the provisions of the law)¹³ and pointed to "the danger of introducing [one's] own tastes and prejudices into the administration of the province"¹⁴ entrusted to him.

He also explicated the general principle of his nationalities policy that reflected both a modern legal understanding of citizenship and, more am-

¹⁰ Urusov, *Zapiski gubernatora*, 130–31.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹² *Ibid.*, 20.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

biguously, the tolerance of ethnic diversity that a more secure imperial center could have fully supported. The governor attempted to “always follow, firmly and consistently, the point of view that the Jews are exactly the same Russian subjects as the rest of Russia’s population” and can therefore enjoy equal “protection of the laws and the authorities with regard to their security.”¹⁵ The prince clearly represented that segment of Russian educated society and the bureaucracy that felt increasingly alienated from a monarchy that sought to shift the focus of loyalty to itself, moving away from its role as the guarantor of state unity and the common good of its subjects to its function as the symbolic embodiment of the “Russian people” (i.e., the peasantry). This conservative, nationalist rhetoric provoked Urusov’s angry rebuttal due to his vision of the imperial state as a set of institutions meant to serve as an arbiter for the multitude of interests represented within the population of the empire. One can infer from his position that he saw the policies of St. Petersburg as threats to the equilibrium that the state had to preserve. Urusov concludes his analysis of the factors leading to the 1903 pogrom by stating the following: “I consider our government guilty of the protection that it provides for narrowly nationalistic ideas; [it is also guilty] of a short-sighted and brutal policy toward the peripheries and the aliens of the empire [*okrainam i inorodtsam*]; [it is guilty] of the fact that this policy has maintained mutual distrust and hatred among distinct nationalities [*narodnostei*].”¹⁶ The disunity, rivalry, and occasionally open incitement of radical nationalist elements that form this picture of the Russian government provide a glimpse of the difficulty that official discourse encountered in camouflaging the challenges to imperial authority that were readily apparent in the first years of the twentieth century.

The 1912 Anniversary and the Early Twentieth-Century Russian Imperial Context

In late imperial Russia, mass celebrations and festive anniversaries of noteworthy events played a significant role in securing political loyalty to the dynasty, and they also imbued the masses with monarchist and Russian nationalist sentiments. The early twentieth century was known at the time as a period of “jubilee-mania.” According to the calculations of the Russian researcher K. N. Tsimbaev, there were more than 160 significant anniversaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Most of them occurred during the last decade of Russian imperial his-

¹⁵ Ibid., 21.

¹⁶ Ibid., 132.

tory.¹⁷ Among these events were four anniversaries commemorating the annexations of various provinces to the Russian Empire: the centenary of Georgia in 1901, the centenary of Finland in 1909, the bicentenary of Estland's annexation in 1910, and the Bessarabian centenary in 1912.¹⁸

In the early twentieth century, loyalty to the monarch was still perceived to a large extent in dynastic terms, even if the dynasty itself strove to be represented as the embodiment of a more nationally conscious community. In the Bessarabian case, this ambiguity was evident both at the superficial level of rhetoric and at the deeper level of unarticulated assumptions. The language of dynasty and Orthodoxy was mingled in an uneasy union with elements of an emerging national vocabulary that sought to appropriate Bessarabia not only for the Russian Empire as a multi- and supranational entity, but more narrowly for the Russian nation that had to be simultaneously imagined and constructed as the preeminent group. The insecurity of the Russian national project explains the dominant position of the traditional bases for legitimization as late as 1912, but the increasing frequency and forcefulness of national tropes indicates a possible trajectory of development that was cut short by World War I and its aftermath. This is relevant not only in the local Bessarabian context, but also in regard to the broader shifts in the representation of the Russian monarchy after the accession of Alexander III in 1881.

As Richard Wortman notes in his magisterial study of the “scenarios of power” in the Russian Empire, the emperor’s coronation “expressed not the unity of the Petrine empire with old Russia, but the true Muscovite identity of the Russian monarchy, despite its Western trappings.”¹⁹ However, this invocation of “Muscovite tradition” was “profoundly anti-traditional” because it “diminished the eighteenth and nineteenth [centuries] and de-legitimized the legalistic bureaucracy, the intelligentsia, and the dynamic of reform that had reached its culmination in the previous reign.”²⁰ As previously noted, one cannot speak of a conscious and systematic policy of Russification as the aim of the Russian government. Nevertheless, in the sphere of rhetoric and symbolism a clear change occurred. Perhaps too bluntly, Wortman points to these processes when he asserts that “the idealized conception of the empire shifted from a multinational elite serving the Westernized European emperor to an Orthodox, ethnically

¹⁷ K. N. Tsimbaev, “Fenomen iubileemanii v rossiiskoi obshchestvennoi zhizni kontsa XIX – nachala XX veka” [The phenomenon of “jubilee-mania” in Russian public life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century], *Voprosy istorii*, no. 11 (2005): 108.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁹ Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, 236.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 236–37.

Russian elite serving the Russian tsar.”²¹ These tendencies prevailed during the reign of Alexander III’s successor, Nicholas II, when an additional element of political mobilization further complicated the picture. These developments bore witness not so much to the monarchy’s regressive drive, but to a peculiar technique aimed at manipulating the potential of nationalism as a means of consolidating imperial authority on the basis of new principles. The central and provincial bureaucracy, while paying lip service to new rhetorical requirements, remained passive and divided over the extent of this symbolic shift and even more so when it came to the practical implementation of such measures. Official discourse only partly camouflaged the incoherence and reactive nature of state policies, which were often inconsistent and contradictory. The Romanian reaction and response to Russian ceremonies provides an additional criterion for assessing the significance of ritual and symbolic reenactment in the process of Bessarabia’s integration into the Russian Empire.

The scenario of early twentieth-century celebrations was rather uniform: the local representatives of the empire created jubilee committees, published historical books for the people, organized public displays and parades, delivered celebratory speeches, and so forth. It is important to note, however, that compared to Bessarabia’s centenary, the anniversaries in the other borderlands were rather modest both in terms of their ideological messages and the organization of ceremonies. This was mostly due to the fact that their organizers had to consider the potential resistance of local non-Russian national elites, who were practically absent in Bessarabia. Only in Georgia were there attempts, albeit largely unsuccessful, to involve the indigenous population by depicting its loyalty and purported openness to Russification.²² This peculiarity can be explained by the common confessional identity shared by Russians and the local population both in Georgia and Bessarabia. For the Bessarabian elite, the anniversary was a chance to present the province and its primarily Moldavian population as a model for other imperial borderlands.

At the same time, the celebration of the centennial anniversary of Bessarabia’s annexation in 1912 illustrates the disruptions of the social fabric at the local level that affected the symbolic sphere in multiple ways. The earliest indications of the symbolic competition that was to characterize the

²¹ Ibid., 237.

²² Otar Dzhanlidze, “Zavoevanie ili dobrovol’noe prisoedinenie?” [Conquest or voluntary accession?], in *Nekotorye voprosy gruzino-russkikh vzaimootnoshenii v sovremennoi istoriografii* [Some issues concerning Georgian-Russian mutual relations in contemporary historiography], *Komissii po istorii, arkhologii i etnologii natsional’noi AN Gruzii* (Tbilisi: Nauchnyi tsentr po izucheniiu i propagande istorii, etnologii i religii, 2011), 198–99.

official preparations for the ceremonies were connected to the creation of a special committee to coordinate the May 1912 proceedings. On this occasion, several alternative centers for the organization of the festivities emerged. The local nobility, *zemstvo* institutions, representatives of the central authorities, and the Church hierarchy all competed for the preeminent role in defining Bessarabia's place within the empire.²³ Besides the traditional themes of a common Orthodox faith, the imperial civilizing mission embodied in the province's spiritual and material progress during the century of Russian rule, and the unwavering loyalty of the local population to dynasty and empire, certain striking new elements were present that signaled the Russian monarchy's entry into the modern era of nationalism. The use of such tropes could be seen in the recurrent representations of the empire as a family of peoples and the repeated use of family motifs in official accounts.

The nature of the relationship between Bessarabia and Russia was commonly expressed in terms denoting a close, even intimate relationship. The most frequent among them were "co-participation" (*priobshchenie*), which refers mostly to the sphere of the state and the values of material civilization associated with it, and "merging" (*sliianie*), which denotes the organic character of Bessarabia's inclusion into Russian space, as well as the direct link between the Russian and Moldavian peoples, as distinguished from the imperial state.²⁴ The importance of family metaphors should not be automatically connected to the influence of nationalism on the outlook of bureaucrats and local intellectuals. However, in the case of Bessarabia, the mode of rhetorical representation corresponded to the transition to a nationalizing narrative. This was due to the ambiguous status of Bessarabia in respect to the Russian core. Though acknowledged as a pe-

²³ For a detailed discussion of the social dimension of Russian imperial discourse and the different variations within it that became apparent on this occasion, see Cusco, Taki, and Grom, *Bessarabiia v sostave Rossiiskoi Imperii*, Chapter 8, 293–312.

²⁴ One should note a peculiar rhetorical continuity in the usage of family-related tropes between the imperial and Soviet periods. Moreover, in the Bessarabian case this usage predated 1912. For example, in a novel by the notorious Bessarabian writer and political activist, P. A. Krushevan, *Chto takoe Rossiia? Putevye zametki* [What is Russia? Travel notes] (Moscow: Kushnerev et Co., 1896), he depicts Russia as a "family of peoples" (372–73) and talks about the Moldavians' "merging" (*sliilis'*) with "mighty Russia." According to Krushevan, this process is expressed through the Moldavians' openness to linguistic and cultural Russification (323). Krushevan would reiterate this interpretation of the relationship between Moldavians and Russians quite often in his subsequent newspaper articles and brochures. In the early twentieth century, such rhetoric was typical of right-wing Bessarabian journalists and politicians.

riphery and imbued with a sense of otherness, the bond between this region and the Great Russian core was portrayed as stronger than in many other cases. Since the family metaphor transcended the boundaries of estate and bureaucratic discourse, one can thus interpret this symbolic connection as a general underlying feature of the Russian public's image of the province. It manifested itself in three basic forms: 1) the direct invocation of a filial or brotherly relationship between Bessarabia and Russia; 2) the affinity between the Russian and Moldavian peoples that created the preconditions for the gradual merging of Bessarabian Romanians into Russian society; and 3) the introduction of the theme of Russian blood as a rhetorical device that certified Bessarabia's belonging to the empire.²⁵

The use of family metaphors is scattered throughout the array of sources pertaining to the official proceedings of the celebration. One of the most poignant examples can be found in the report of the provincial marshal of the nobility on the activities of the Anniversary Committee concerning the erection of the monument to Alexander I,²⁶ which was inaugurated on June 3, 1914, in the presence of Emperor Nicholas II who arrived in Bessarabia's main city, Kishinev, via Odessa after his meeting with the Romanian King Carol I at Constanța. The monument itself was meant to represent the indissoluble bond between the province and the empire. Thus, the sculptural ensemble had to include not only the statue of the emperor, but, significantly, an allegorical representation meant to be understood in the following way: "In the front part of the pedestal there is a bronze allegorical relief that represents Russia embracing Bessarabia; above the relief a bronze two-headed eagle [will be placed]."²⁷ One can decipher the representation of "empire as family" here without much difficulty. Despite the usual bureaucratic wrangling, the project was completed in due course along the lines described above. Alexander I's statue, erected in front of the archbishop's residence, represented a powerful symbol of Bessarabia's belonging to the empire. As the local Orthodox Church journal reported on the occasion of the monument's inauguration, it "depicted the emperor standing, his bronze figure placed on a pink granite pedestal. Seven stairs carved from the same material led to the pedestal. In front of it, a [bronze] relief was constructed, representing two women." One of them (symbolizing the Russian Empire) embraced the other one (symboliz-

²⁵ Cusco, Taki, and Grom, *Bessarabiia v sostave Rossiiskoi Imperii*, 307–12.

²⁶ In an editorial article published in the conservative Russian daily *Novoe vremia* on May 18, 1912, Alexander I is awarded the "honorific title" of *Prisoedinitel'* ("the one who merged Bessarabia with Russia"). In a clear allusion to the widely used family rhetoric, the same article emphasizes that "Russia gave an abode [*priiutila*] to Bessarabia."

²⁷ Lashkov, *Prazdnovanie Stoletiiia prisoedineniia Bessarabii*, 50.

ing Bessarabia).²⁸ The importance accorded to such signs of Russia's presence in Bessarabia is an indicator of the empire's investment in concrete projects aimed at the Russification of space in the borderlands. This symbolically charged imperial message was sufficiently internalized by contemporaries for the statue to be destroyed during the upheaval of 1918.

The 1912 Anniversary and Bessarabia's Public Sphere

The rhetorical models and patterns discussed above also constituted the framework for the public expressions of the province's intellectuals on the occasion of the jubilee. This was also the case of some unofficial publications that painted a less favorable image of the anniversary and even included some sketches of everyday life that provided a critical view of early twentieth-century Bessarabian society.²⁹ Of course, the officially sanctioned

²⁸ Poștarencu, *O istorie a Basarabiei în date și documente, 1812–1940*, 154. The description above is from *Kishinevskie eparkhial'nye vedomosti*, no. 25, 1914. The most detailed picture of the debates surrounding the erection of the monument and the commemorative medal issued in June 1914 on the occasion of its official inauguration can be found in RGIA, fond 1284, op. 187, d. 124 (“O prazdnovaniï stoletia prisoedineniia Bessarabii k Rossii i o sooruzhenii pamiatnika Imperatoru Aleksandru I-mu v Kishineve”), ll. 244–341. The design of the monument was entrusted to the famous Italian architect Ettore Ximenes. On December 7, 1911, the *Russkoe slovo* newspaper informed its readers that the Gubernial Assembly had allocated 10,000 rubles for the project and had initiated an official appeal for financial donations in order to complete the monument's construction.

²⁹ One of the most illustrative examples of such literature is the short collection of amateur poems published by a local advertising agency. It included, for example, a number of poems devoted to Bessarabian industry or even, in a slightly ironic manner, to the economic and social “backwardness” of the region that left plenty of room for improvement in the field of social services and public welfare. Cf. *Stoletnii iubilei prisoedineniia Bessarabii k Rossii. 1812–1912 gg.* [The one-hundredth jubilee of Bessarabia's incorporation into Russia: 1812–1912] (Kishinev: Tip. “Energiia,” 1912), 8, 16–18, 19–20. This short collection is also revealing for the social hierarchies at the local level, which are expressed through the prominent place awarded to administrators or *zemstvo* activists who left an imprint on local affairs—most notably, the long-serving mayor of Kishinev, Karl Schmidt (1877–1903), and the *zemstvo* member and philanthropist, K. F. Kazimir, cf. 12, 15. However, even such autonomous initiatives were heavily indebted to the discursive stances discussed above. Thus, the motive of “the Russian Empire as a civilizing force” is present (14), as well as the usual “founding figures” who frame the narrative of Bessarabia's inclusion into the empire (aside from Russian monarchs, the personalities of Suvorov and Pushkin are part of this

narratives of the event did not contain instances of full-fledged oppositional discourse. The scarce expressions of the collective entity of the “people” frequently invoked during the celebration period were highly ritualistic and orchestrated gestures that at best reflected literate intermediaries’ (overwhelmingly priests’ or local officials’) understanding of the anniversary’s significance.³⁰ This picture emerges from the petitions addressed either to the archbishop (in the absence of a designated governor) or directly to the emperor by various Bessarabian communities.³¹ Ritualistic invocations of the population’s enthusiasm and active participation in locally organized religious services and secular festivities shed light on the efforts of local notables to mobilize the population during the anniversary, but reveal little about their actual impact (if any) on the wider public.

The more elaborate addresses and petitions of scholarly associations (e.g., the Bessarabian Provincial Scholarly Archival Commission), *zemstvo* institutions, or separate estates (e.g., the Kishinev *meshchane*) provide some interesting examples in which specific issues are reflected upon. For example, the address of the Archival Commission emphasized that “on the basis of the preserved documents” one could ascertain that “the autochthonous population of Bessarabia, from the most ancient times throughout our whole history had always [remained] faithful to its sovereigns,” which explained why it “staunchly displayed its . . . loyalty to the Great Russian throne” and why it preserved in its midst the principles of “duty, legality, and order.”³² The address of the provincial *zemstvo* predictably focused on the incorporation of Bessarabia into the Russian state, but also mentioned “the great transformations [*preobrazovaniia*] of the Tsar-Liberator and the further reforms of local administration” that “put Bessarabia on par with central Russian *guberniias*.”³³ Even the most liberal circles of local society grouped around the *zemstvo* institutions hardly expressed any dissenting

image, cf. 5–7, 10–11). The Russian “heroes” are also invoked (cf. 3–4). Still, the specifically national topics are conspicuously absent, which, in conjunction with subtle anti-authoritarian allusions, warrant the conclusion that the emerging intellectual and professional strata did not completely accept the idiom imposed on them.

³⁰ Thus, the aforementioned article published in *Novoe vremia* on May 18, 1912, refers to the official ceremonies organized two days before, stating that “a Procession of the Cross took place which was attended by a huge gathering of the people. A popular lecture on the anniversary’s topic was organized in the Archbishop’s residence. On the city’s squares, popular dance festivities have been organized, along with free performances for the common people in the theaters.”

³¹ Lashkov, *Prazdnovanie Stoletii prisoedineniia Bessarabii*, 82–89.

³² *Ibid.*, 87.

³³ *Ibid.*, 87–88.

views. The reform rhetoric was itself framed by the integrative perspective of the center, which paid special attention to the similarity between the Bessarabian periphery and the Russian core. A final case worth noting is that of the Kishinev urban dwellers who elaborated their petition following the “restoration of old Rus” theme that prevailed in many of the court and monarchical circles at the time. Representing itself in unambiguous terms as “true to the principles [*zavetam*] of the venerable and glorious olden times,” the society of local *meshchane* assured the tsar that it was “filled with the unanimous desire to promote in the future as well the Russian cause [*russkoe delo*] in Bessarabia.”³⁴ This is one of the rare cases when a social group attempted to articulate its role beyond ostensibly official or bureaucratic concerns, though its autonomy is highly questionable given the context and the top-down character of official ceremonies.

The internal analysis of the Russian stance on Bessarabia during the 1912 anniversary uncovers a number of interesting patterns that place the region in an empire-wide context. Bessarabia acquired a distinct but not entirely unique image in the multiethnic structure of the Russian Empire, even if this image stressed the organic and natural bond between this borderland and the center.³⁵ The ethnicity of the majority of the Bessarabian population and its affinity for neighboring Romanians was not a serious problem for local authorities throughout the nineteenth century. Only starting from the first Russian Revolution (1905) and the concurrent emergence of Bessarabian Moldavian nationalism, which was viewed as pro-Romanian, did Russian officials and proponents of the Russian cause in Bessarabia turn their attention toward the “Moldavian issue.” Despite the weakening of the national movement between 1908 and 1912, discussions about Moldavian separatism and pro-Romanian irredentism did not cease. On the contrary, they became more frequent both at the local level and at

³⁴ Ibid., 88.

³⁵ A synthetic presentation of the social, economic, and cultural progress in Bessarabia under Russian rule can be found in N. V. Lashkov, ed., *Bessarabiia. K stoletiiu prisoedineniia k Rossii. 1812, 16.5 – 1912. Geograficheskii i istoriko-statisticheskii obzor sostoianiiia kraia* [On the occasion of the one-hundredth anniversary of Bessarabia’s incorporation into Russia] (Kishinev: Tipografia Gubernskogo Pravleniia, 1912). A special film about the anniversary ceremonies and Bessarabia as a Russian province was also produced. See Ven. E. Vishnevskii, *Dokumental’nye fil’m y dorevoliutsionnoi Rossii (1907–1916)* [The documentary films of pre-revolutionary Russia (1907–1916)] (Moscow: Muzei Kino, 1996), nr. 1319, 150. For a critical analysis of Lashkov’s assertions, see P. Cubolteanu, “Scrisori din Basarabia” [Letters from Bessarabia], *Viața românească* 7, nos. 5–6 (1912): 401. The same author writes (400–409) about the conscious exaggeration of the scale of the festive ceremonies in Bessarabia that was quite frequent in the Russian press.

the center.³⁶ The growing presence of the Moldavian population during the 1912 festivities was apparently due to these previous debates and to Romania's claims to Bessarabia, which were mostly based on the invocation of common ethnicity.

The role of the indigenous Moldavian population was significant for the organizers of the Bessarabian festivities. In the official program of the ceremonies published in 1914 by the Bessarabian clergyman and writer, Nikolai V. Lashkov, one of their most important aims was the following: "To strengthen in the minds of the Moldavian population through their reading of this popular jubilee collection, through church sermons and the distribution of leaflets [*listkov*], [the impression of] the high price paid by Russia for their liberty and prosperity."³⁷ However, in the original version written in 1911, the Moldavians were not mentioned at all. Instead, the text talked about "the local population" and the price paid for the liberation of "Christian peoples."³⁸ It is possible that the need to emphasize the Moldavian dimension of the festivities appeared later. The preoccupation with the Moldavian population was also apparent in the speeches and church services held in Romanian during the celebrations. The official jubilee publication, *The Centenary of Bessarabia's Annexation to Russia* by N. Lashkov, was translated into Romanian by Grigore Constantinescu, who was known for his nationalist views. The booklet was distributed, along with bilingual leaflets issued by the local Orthodox brotherhood, in hundreds of thousands of copies throughout Bessarabia.³⁹ Archbishop Serafim (Chichagov) went even further, proclaiming that the idea to build the monument to Alexander I was an initiative of the Moldavian population.⁴⁰

On May 15, 1912, a public lecture on the history of Bessarabia based on Lashkov's brochure was held. Speaking about Moldavians, the author emphasized that they had been deprived of their own national culture for a long time because under the Turks they had to struggle for survival instead of focusing on cultural activities.⁴¹ Lashkov also mentioned the role of the Slavonic language and culture in the medieval Moldavian Principality. In his opinion, the "Slavic spirit" was so deeply implanted in Moldavians that

³⁶ For example, see the publications in the newspapers *Rossiia* and *Sankt-Peterburgskie Vedomosti* in 1909–10, as well as the discussion about the introduction of Moldavian-language education in the State Duma in 1910–11.

³⁷ Lashkov, *Prazdnovanie Stoletiiia prisoedineniia Bessarabii*, 2.

³⁸ Arhiva Națională a Republicii Moldova (ANRM), f. 208, op. 3, d. 4548, l. 4 verso.

³⁹ Lashkov, *Prazdnovanie Stoletiiia prisoedineniia Bessarabii*, 13; ANRM. f. 208, op. 3, d. 4548, l. 20.

⁴⁰ Lashkov, *Prazdnovanie Stoletiiia prisoedineniia Bessarabii*, 92.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

they were long considered “an Eastern and Slavic people.”⁴² Here Lashkov hints at the special position of Moldavians in the ethnic hierarchy of the Russian Empire. Their purported semi-Slavic origins brought them very close to the Orthodox East Slavic core of the empire; thus, they were eligible to become a part of the all-Russian nation. This point of view was widespread and accounted for the fact that Moldavians, in contrast to other non-Russians, were accepted and actively participated in Russian right-wing monarchist and nationalist organizations, such as the Union of Russian People.

In his speech addressed to the local authorities and estate representatives, Archbishop Serafim pointed out that the festive ceremonies were an important means of Russifying Moldavians. In his opinion, “the truth” about the feats of the Russians and of their “Supreme Leaders” [*Verkhovnykh Vozhdei*] should be reinforced in Moldavians’ minds, “teaching them not only to speak and pray in the Russian language, but also to think, feel, and act in a Russian way [*po-russki*].”⁴³ At the same time, Serafim claimed that Moldavians had already merged (*slilis'*) with the Russians: “The heart of the Moldavian people is beating together with the Russian one.”⁴⁴ This contradiction was quite typical for Russian right-wing activists writing on the “Moldavian question” at that time.

The anniversary generated various reflections in the local press related to the “Moldavian question” and Russian-Romanian relations. The national activist and future historian Alexandru Boldur published an article in *Bessarabskaia zhizn'* in which he conducted a legal analysis of Russian-Moldavian relations over the previous century. In his opinion, the Russian Empire changed its attitude toward the Moldavians, shifting from initial support to a policy of forced Russification. For him, the anniversary was a reason to revert to the initial, benevolent policy. On a practical level this meant introducing the Moldavian language in local churches and schools, a policy that most local nationalists supported.⁴⁵

In the same issue of the newspaper, a satirical article by Mikhail Nedolin (Mikhail Isaakovich Grossman) was published in which he reflected on current events. The main question for Nedolin was what Bessarabia had gained after its annexation by Russia. Analyzing the history of Bessarabia, the author concluded that even if Bessarabia did not acquire much, it “lost little, exchanging Romania and Turkey for Russia.” In his view, Romania did nothing for Bessarabia, and its tears of mourning were absolutely unjustified. Moreover, Romanians did not understand Russia’s

⁴² *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁵ *Bessarabskaia Zhizn'*, 1912, no. 111.

mission to liberate Balkan Christians, including Romanians themselves. Like official ideologists, the liberal publicist used the same metaphor of “Russian blood” to assert Bessarabia’s belonging to Russia. Nedolin viewed Romanian displays of mourning as a sign of ingratitude. Yet, he did not share the same fears concerning these Romanian manifestations of mourning, viewing the “lamentations” as harmless and even worthy of sympathy.⁴⁶

Skepticism about the anniversary festivities was widespread even in the conservative press. For example, the right-wing daily *Drug* published an anonymous article entitled “1812–1912,” which claimed that the Romanian reaction was reasonable and unsurprising. In the author’s opinion, such mass ceremonies were not welcome because their potentially positive impact inside Bessarabia might be negligible compared to the possible diplomatic confrontation with Romania.⁴⁷ In this respect, *Drug*’s correspondent echoed the idea of the St. Petersburg publicist Nikolai N. Durnovo, whose perspective was also close to the official position of the Romanian king.⁴⁸

Behind this façade of unity, the province’s contested character constantly undermined the efforts of imperial administrators to secure Bessarabia’s status within the empire. Russian authorities were well aware of the potentially negative reaction that the celebrations might generate in the Kingdom of Romania. Thus, before discussing Romania’s reaction, it is necessary to examine how Russian officials reflected on the projected Romanian response.

Russian-Romanian Symbolic Competition and the “Romanian Response”

1912 represented not only the moment when two diametrically opposed visions of Bessarabia were articulated, but also when the Russian and Romanian states directly clashed. The Bessarabian authorities were clearly troubled by Romanian national demonstrations that challenged imperial images of Bessarabia so carefully crafted by local publicists and bureaucrats. Three weeks prior to the May 16 ceremonies, Bessarabian police officials’ apprehension was growing. Thus, the chief of the Bessarabian Gendarmes reported to his superiors that, in connection with the forthcoming anniversary, “the Romanian press organized a propaganda campaign [*agitatsiia*] that aims at proclaiming the days of the Kishinev festivities as

⁴⁶ *Bessarabskaia Zhizn'*, 1912, no. 111, no. 112.

⁴⁷ *Drug*, 1912, no. 112.

⁴⁸ See *Sankt-Peterburgskie Vedomosti*, 1912, no. 118 and no. 136.

days of Romanian national mourning.”⁴⁹ Russian officials appeared to be well-informed regarding the planned demonstrations since they mentioned a series of symbolically charged events that had been under preparation. Tellingly, these measures were depicted as mainly hypothetical and initiated from below; that is, by certain elements of the journalistic and intellectual milieu. Aside from purely demonstrative gestures, such as “decorating the houses of Iași, Galați, and Brăila with flags bent in mourning and appearing in the street wearing mourning clothes,”⁵⁰ demonstrators would also voice their protest by “holding public lectures and also lectures in educational institutions” that would focus on describing “the event of ‘severing a part of the Romanian people.’”⁵¹

Another component of this symbolic challenge was the proposal to “compile brochures on the same topic,” a task entrusted to “two history professors.”⁵² This information, however fragmentary, pointed to the Bessarabian authorities’ concerns about the potential danger that Romanian national discourse represented. In a later document, this motif was reinforced through the invocation of “intelligence data” that would confirm the preparation of “anti-Russian demonstrations in Romania” for the anniversary ceremonies.⁵³ In fact, the author generalized beyond the actual information contained in the previous account on which he relied and emphasized that “there are conversations held openly referring to the annexation of a part of our Bessarabia.”⁵⁴ This last point is especially significant for the picture of Romanian irredentists developed by Russian officials themselves, even if it was hardly warranted by the public statements of the Romanian press and intellectuals. However, the situation was clarified through the subsequent correspondence between the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which explicitly referred both to the sources and the protagonists of the planned protests. Unsurprisingly, the center of events appeared to be the University of Iași, with the initiative clearly attributed to the prominent Romanian historian A. D. Xenopol.⁵⁵ In this context, the Russian sources inadvertently provide additional data on the dynamics of the Romanian response. The Iași intellectuals grouped around Xenopol and the Bessarabian-born politician Constantin Stere represented an alternative center of discourse on Bessarabia, separate from the Bucharest milieu dominated by another impor-

⁴⁹ GARF, fond 102, op. 121, d. 179 (“O prazdnovanii stoletnego iubileia prisoedineniia Bessarabii k Rossii”), l. 1–2 (document dated April 25, 1912).

⁵⁰ GARF, fond 102, op. 121, d. 179, l. 1.

⁵¹ GARF, fond 102, op. 121, d. 179, l. 2. Quotation marks in original.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ GARF, fond 102, op. 121, d. 179, l. 3 (document dated May 4, 1912).

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ GARF, fond 102, op. 121, d. 179, l. 5. The direct source for this information is the Iași newspaper *Minerva*, no. 1170, March 20, 1912.

tant Romanian historian, Nicolae Iorga. Despite his active involvement and extensive commentary on this occasion, Iorga hardly appeared in Russian police sources discussing the Romanian reaction to the celebration.

Another institutional dimension that provides additional information on the Romanian reaction to the celebration, but also discloses the inconsistencies and differing interpretations of the event within official circles in Russia, emerges from the diplomatic reports sent by the Russian chargé d'affaires in Romania, A. Lysakovskii, to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Sazonov in April and May 1912. The diplomat strove to minimize the involvement of the Romanian government in the planned demonstrations, emphasizing the Romanian prime minister's assurances that his government "will not take part in any demonstrations or protests against the organization of a celebration that seems quite natural for us [Russians]."⁵⁶ On this occasion, Prime Minister Maiorescu did not fail to compare the 1912 events to the large-scale protests in 1875 against similar ceremonies organized by Austria-Hungary in Bukovina, which had been annexed by the Habsburg Empire in 1775. Maiorescu contended that "no serious incidents are to be expected on May 16" given the "sincere benevolent feelings toward Russia" espoused by the Romanian people, which was purportedly not the case with regard to Germany and Austria. The Russian diplomat noted the irony of such an assertion by Maiorescu, a "convinced Germanophile."⁵⁷ On a more sober note, the envoy observed that Iași, and Iași University in particular, was the "center of agitation." Based on the detailed account of the Russian consul in Iași, the envoy summarized the protest activities planned by the "Romanian intelligentsia" as follows:

To invite all the Romanian patriots to decorate their houses with Romanian national flags bent in mourning on the day of the celebration; to put the "Cultural League"⁵⁸ in charge of all the protest activities; to organize in all towns public lectures on the topic of Bessarabia's alienation; in the countryside, brochures on the same topic, authored by Professor Xenopol in a patriotic spirit, are to be distributed to the peasants; to organize a musical-patriotic performance in the Iași theater; and, finally, to hold mourning services in all the churches, including [accompanying] patriotic sermons.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Imperii (AVPRI), fond 151, Politarkhiv, op. 482, d. 695, l. 40 verso.

⁵⁷ AVPRI, fond 151, Politarkhiv, op. 482, d. 695, l. 41.

⁵⁸ The League for the Cultural Unity of All Romanians, headed by N. Iorga. On the role of this nationalist organization, see more below.

⁵⁹ AVPRI, fond 151, Politarkhiv, op. 482, d. 695, l. 42. The letter of the Russian consul quoted above is available in full: AVPRI, fond 151, Politarkhiv, op. 482, d. 695, l. 43–44. It also hints at some tactical disagreements between the organizers.

Russian diplomats continued to monitor Romanian public opinion closely as the anniversary drew nearer. Thus, in another report in early May, the same envoy informed his superiors in St. Petersburg about the “artificially fomented chauvinism of local public opinion,”⁶⁰ which the government attempted to appease, but ultimately could not ignore and had to accommodate. Curiously, this “chauvinism” was not only apparent in the Romanian press where Xenopol’s and Iorga’s articles often appeared, but was also stimulated by certain pronouncements in the Russian press, notably by the idiosyncratic position of the journalist Nikolai Durnovo, who published his “unorthodox” opinions in the quasi-official newspaper *Sankt-Peterburgskie Vedomosti*.⁶¹

Finally, in a May 21 report drafted after the celebration itself and following the planned protests, the Russian representative in Bucharest attempted to write a careful review and a comprehensive analysis of the Romanian reaction to the Bessarabian celebrations.⁶² The main thrust of the analysis aimed to prove that no official institution was directly involved and that the Romanian counterdemonstrations were concocted by nationalist intellectuals grouped around Iorga and Xenopol. Thus, after listing the main public activities that clearly mirrored the official ceremonies in Russian Bessarabia by constructing a symbolic alternative narrative of the province’s belonging to Romania,⁶³ the Russian diplomat concluded that

⁶⁰ Ibid., l. 56.

⁶¹ Ibid., l. 56 verso. Notably, in the article in question, Durnovo advocated the return of “the Romanian part” of Bessarabia to the Romanian Kingdom. Needless to say, the historically inspired argument featured prominently both in this article and in the polemical answer penned by Dimitrie Moruzi, one of the most articulate writers on Bessarabian matters in the Kingdom. The diplomat euphemistically alludes to the damage that such “undesirable” polemics did to the Russian position in his assessment of the “strong impression” that Moruzi’s article made on Romanian elites and intellectuals.

⁶² Ibid., l. 62–65.

⁶³ These activities included: a commemorative service dedicated to the memory of the “Romanians” fallen in the Russo-Japanese War; the opening of a “Bessarabian museum,” in which “Professor Iorga collected paintings, plans, maps, photographs, and documents pertaining to Bessarabia”; the selling (by students) of small national badges with the following inscription: “1812 – Bessarabia’s loss; 1912 – its sad anniversary; 2012 – With God’s Help!,” with the profit earmarked for the construction of a dormitory for Bessarabian students at Iași University; an evening “commemorative gathering” at Bucharest University; a special “Bessarabian session” at the Romanian Academy, including presentations by Professor Istrati on the Hotin fortress and by Iorga on his work “Our Bessarabia”; a commemorative performance in a Bucharest concert hall, including the reciting of “patriotic poems” by the Romanian national poet, Mihai Eminescu, and the sing-

throughout Romania these anti-Russian protests were limited to “flags, badges, discourses, and youth enthusiasm heated by several professors.”⁶⁴ The author endeavored to prove to the authorities in St. Petersburg that all these reactions were not “serious” and were limited to expressions of “academic sympathy toward the enslaved brothers” that would not have major political repercussions. Moreover, the “reproaches” leveled at the Russian Empire were “mild” in the diplomat’s opinion.⁶⁵ Despite the Russian envoy’s optimistic outlook, the specter of Bessarabia as a contested borderland and the future uncertainty about its status suddenly reemerges in the closing lines of his report, where he asserts the following:

However, one should point to the tendency, which has been strengthening lately, to restore the spiritual community between Romania and Bessarabia by supporting the schools, the churches, and the Romanian language in this region. This is the only truly serious result of the agitation campaign. Being aware that the moment for greater desires and aims has not arrived yet, the local [Romanian] public is looking for ways to preserve this unity. In this regard, the opening of the student dormitory at Iași University and the printing of cheap [popular] publications to be distributed in Bessarabia are actually of real significance.⁶⁶

The Police Department and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were not the only imperial institutions concerned with the potential Romanian reaction to the ceremonies. Perhaps the most interesting document attesting to the intensity of the symbolic competition and to certain Russian officials’ awareness that the planned celebrations were indispensable for reinforcing Russian claims to Bessarabia was an official letter sent to Russian Prime Minister Vladimir N. Kokovtsov by a high-ranking official providing a detailed analysis of the celebration’s significance.⁶⁷ Reiterating the Bessarabian population’s loyalty to the empire, this letter openly declares that “this day [the anniversary] needs to be celebrated as solemnly as possible in order to inscribe it forever in the memory of Bessarabia’s younger generation. These solemn ceremonies ought to emphasize, primarily, the complete unity [*polnoe edinenie*] of the Whole Empire with this land that became part

ing of “patriotic songs”; and, finally, a special concluding speech by Iorga dedicated to the loss of Bessarabia. For details see: *Ibid.*, l. 62 verso–63 verso.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, l. 64.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, l. 64 verso.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, l. 64 verso–65.

⁶⁷ The question of authorship is difficult to solve in this case. In my opinion, the author is either Archbishop Serafim or A. N. Haruzin, the deputy minister of the interior at that time and a former Bessarabian governor (1904–8) well acquainted with the province.

of the Empire one hundred years ago.”⁶⁸ The unknown author further developed his argument in the theretofore clearest expression of Russian concerns about the contested status of the province. This passage is worth reproducing in full:

At present, there is some information that certain circles in the neighboring state of Romania object, in a rather loud and persistent manner, to Russia's desire to officially mark the day of the one-hundredth anniversary of Bessarabia's subjection to the State dominion of the Russian Empire. These groups (mostly consisting of professors from Iași and Bucharest universities, students, and other strata of the intelligentsia) point to the fact that Bessarabia has been a Romanian land since time immemorial and that the whole of Romania should staunchly remember this fact and should, accordingly, mark this day of “Bessarabia's annexation to Russia” as a day of general popular mourning. Taking into account these tendencies inside Romania, we are confronted with a rather serious question: how to deal with the forthcoming festivities? Given the general orientation of the population of the Romanian Kingdom, which is related to Bessarabia's inhabitants, it seems necessary either to completely abandon the plans for organizing these celebrations and to strive to mark this date as modestly as possible in order not to irritate our neighbors, or, conversely, it is necessary to take all possible measures so that these solemn ceremonies are conducted with the greatest possible luxury and brilliance. In case the Russian Government takes no consistent steps in order to officially celebrate the one-hundredth anniversary of Bessarabia's inclusion into the Empire, Romania will interpret it as a sign that Russia is not confident and secure about the general orientation of Bessarabia's population and, therefore, will not take the risk of marking this anniversary. Russia's sense of dignity, of course, cannot allow this.⁶⁹

The author then concludes with an injunction “to endow this solemn day with a popular and local character and to make it the expression of the feelings of the local population,” so that it does not turn into “purely . . . a formal and state-sponsored [*kazennym*] event.”⁷⁰ This preoccupation with the legitimization of the celebration through popular participation not only pointed to the perceived vulnerability of imperial discourse, but also to the growing understanding of the impact of mass politics in Bessarabia.

As is clear from the three institutional perspectives sketched above, the stance of Russian officials toward the Romanian demonstrations was somewhat ambiguous. The reaction of the Romanian public, though annoying for the Russians, was carefully dissociated from the position of the

⁶⁸ Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv (RGIA), fond 1284, op. 187, d. 124, ll. 71–72.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, ll. 71–72.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, l. 72.

state authorities. In an official letter of the war minister to the minister of internal affairs, the distinction between public opinion, especially nationalist intellectuals' attitudes, and the restraint of the authorities was highlighted: "The jubilee celebrations in Bessarabia . . . generally caused a painful response [*boleznennyi otklik*] in Romanian society, and particularly in the intellectual [*intelligentskoi*] milieu, among professors and students. The Romanian chauvinists have already raised a propaganda campaign [*agitatsiui*] throughout the country with the aim of protesting against the celebration of an event woeful for Romania—the conquest of a purportedly [*iakoby*] Romanian province by Russia."⁷¹ The Russian official saw the potential impact of such attempts to mobilize a wider social constituency as minimal since "both the Romanian Government and the serious statesmen [*gosudarstvennye liudi*] of the country are not involved in such propaganda," which, he predicted, "will not assume a provocative character toward Russia."⁷² Nevertheless, another bureaucratic recommendation emphasized the subversive nature of the works that the Romanian intellectuals intended to produce according to Xenopol's plan outlined above: "It would be, perhaps, convenient to apply measures against the penetration into Russia of the brochures" that were "composed by the Romanian professors."⁷³ The concerned officials were thus aware of the mobilizing potential of nationalist intellectuals and of the irredentist current that was starting to have a significant impact on the country's intellectual and political establishment.

This is not to suggest that Bessarabia represented a central theme in Romanian national discourse, but merely to point out that in the increasingly tense international climate of the prewar years a part of the Russian bureaucracy came to regard Bessarabia as a threatened territory. The increasingly nationalist rhetoric pervading Russian discourse contributed to these shifts as well. A striking example was a diplomatic incident that marred Russian-Romanian relations during the anniversary. The incident itself was rather minor, but both sides regarded its implications as too important to ignore. Accordingly, in the introductory part of the report describing the event, the author's wording is rather strong: "Romania, which at present finds itself in an alliance with Austria-Hungary, dreams [*mechtaet*], in the case of war between Russia and Austria, to receive all Bessarabia from Austria as a prize for its attack against Russia."⁷⁴ This bellicose rhetoric that characterized many Bessarabian officials' statements, especially those officials working in the police apparatus, reveals the under-

⁷¹ GARF, fond 102, op. 121, d. 179, l. 7.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., l. 20.

⁷⁴ Ibid., l. 17.

lying Russian-Romanian tensions that periodically erupted during moments of overt symbolic competition.

The incident that provoked the sharp rebuke of the deputy chief of the Bessarabian Gendarmes should be interpreted in this context. In a report dated May 16, 1912, the official remarks that “initially, Romania decided to dress itself in mourning during this day,”⁷⁵ but then this intention was dropped in favor of a more “harmless,” but also more striking demonstration.⁷⁶ The increased suspicion of the imperial authorities during the celebration even led to embarrassing moments of confusion that the Russian press quickly turned into major “international incidents.”⁷⁷ Besides the inherent significance of such events, the increasing politicization of Russian and Romanian views on Bessarabia during the celebration period is obvious. Another revealing example of this tendency occurred several days after the celebration. In a rare open pronouncement by Russian nationalist and rightist organizations active in the empire’s southern regions regarding the “demonstrations” in Romania, the Council of the Odessa section of the All-Russian National Union informed the city’s mayor about the “extreme insult to its patriotic feelings” by “the intrusion of a part of the Romanian Kingdom’s population into the internal affairs of our state, which was expressed through the obviously hostile, reckless, and offensive demonstrations” held in Iași and Bucharest on May 16. These events were purportedly met with “total indifference by the Romanian Government and administration,” and they were also a direct challenge to “Russia’s dig-

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ The incident itself consisted of the following: “On this date [May 16], at 7 p.m., the Romanian King Carol I departed from the town of Galați and proceeded down the Danube River on his yacht *extremely close to the Russian shore* [original emphasis], under the protection of two mine carriers and accompanied by his suite.” Both the yacht and the mine carriers were “decorated with Romanian flags.” The king’s seemingly innocuous trip and its impressive fanfare were troubling enough for the Russian authorities to be reported to the minister of foreign affairs two weeks after the fact. See GARF, fond 102, op. 121, d. 179, l. 18–19.

⁷⁷ GARF, fond 102, op. 121, d. 179, l. 23–25. The “incident” involved the “public” of a small border town on the Prut. According to a Russian press report, a “huge crowd” of Romanians gathered on the opposite bank in national costumes in order to sing a “funeral march,” which attracted the attention of the local population. Following the playing of the Russian anthem, the Russian orchestra (as a sign of courtesy) played the Romanian national anthem. To add insult to injury, the Romanians did not respond in the same way, but played their own anthem once again. The chief of the Bessarabian gendarmes had to intervene in order to “rectify” the dramatic journalistic account and to “deflate” what seemed like a politically charged message, concluding that “this case did not have the character of a political manifestation.”

nity.”⁷⁸ This rhetoric was clearly much less restrained than the official position of the Russian authorities, but it undoubtedly reflected the view of at least a part of the imperial political establishment. The Bessarabian region thus emerged as a symbolically and politically contested space that was subject to reconstruction according to the interests of the two rival centers where discursive images of Bessarabia originated.

Romanian National Discourse on Bessarabia during the 1912 Celebrations

Romanian discourse on Bessarabia displayed greater coherence than its Russian counterpart since it considered Bessarabia as a temporarily detached part of the national body. However, the dynamics of Romanian nationalism also had an impact on Bessarabia's perceived importance within the symbolic geography of Romanian national space. The predominance of conservative and organicist stances within Romanian national discourse was also apparent in the Bessarabian case. This is obvious from the work of Nicolae Iorga, a prominent Romanian historian and nationalist whose stance on Bessarabia will be briefly discussed later.

At the rhetorical level, family metaphors were used just as frequently as in Russian discourse, which is perfectly consistent with the internal dynamics of the national narrative. The most striking rhetorical difference naturally concerns the founding events of 1812. Whereas the Russian stance was built upon notions stressing integration, peaceful assimilation, and organic unity—as exemplified by such terms as “unification” (*prisoedinenie*), “merging” (*sliianie*), or “inclusion” (*priobshchenie*)—Romanian literature emphasized a forceful, brutal, and radical break with the past with invariably negative connotations. The most frequent words used to denote this position were “annexation” (*anexarea*), “alienation” (*înstrăinare*), and even the “stealing” (*răpirea*) of Bessarabia. Another expression referred to the breach of an initial and longed-for unity of Moldavia, in which case the appropriate term was the “tearing apart” (*sfâșierea*) of the Moldavian land. Terminology thus proved to be the most contentious field of symbolic competition.

The coherence of Romanian national discourse also derived from the organizational consolidation of the movement for national unification around the League for the Cultural Unity of All Romanians (*Liga pentru unitatea culturală a tuturor românilor*), commonly referred to by contemporaries as the Cultural League (*Liga Culturală*). The 1912 anniversary provided a major opportunity for the assertion of a discourse that combined

⁷⁸ RGIA, fond 1284, op. 187, d. 124, l. 168.

the rhetoric of historical rights with a progressive reading of Romania's present situation that served as a possible Piedmont for the "estranged provinces" (the generic term applied to Bessarabia, Transylvania, and Bukovina in the conventional lexicon of the Romanian national narrative). The most complete and condensed expression of Romanian national discourse during the 1912 events can be found in several writings of the main figure of the early twentieth-century Romanian nationalist movement and the chairman of the Cultural League, Nicolae Iorga.⁷⁹ A short examination of his works dedicated to the commemoration of Bessarabia's "loss" in 1812 should clarify the complex intermingling of nationalist and populist themes that informed his interpretation.⁸⁰

Iorga's initial argument insists on reclaiming Bessarabia for the Romanian "national organism" in rather unambiguous terms. The author accomplishes this task on two interrelated levels. The first is terminological. Iorga vehemently points to the artificial nature of the designation "Bessarabia" in order to delegitimize Russian claims to have created ex nihilo a fundamentally new political and social order. In a revealing passage, Iorga asserts that "we lost the land that I can call 'Bessarabia' only with difficulty and against historical truth, for 'Bessarabia' was only the part from the mouths of the Danube."⁸¹ Of course, this stance is ambiguous. In fact, the Russian-controlled province was willingly appropriated by Romanian national discourse under its official name, which Iorga himself used without any reservation in his earlier and later works. Ultimately, Iorga attempts to deny that there is any fundamental difference between the Russian-controlled territory and the rest of the old Moldavian Principality by positing a connection between the two that would allow for the transfer of the

⁷⁹ It should be noted that Iorga played a prominent role in the Cultural League, which he cofounded and directed until the outbreak of World War I. One of the publications sponsored by Iorga, which promoted the League's ideas and views among rural intellectuals and Romanian village elites, was *Neamul românesc literar* [The literary Romanian nation]. In the introductory note to the issue 18–19 (published on May 19, 1912), Iorga claims that Bessarabia is "Moldavia's best half" (referring to the historical Moldavian Principality).

⁸⁰ Iorga's position, which reflected the views of most of the country's political establishment, was developed in two brochures printed in May 1912. The first, which is more general in character, is entitled "The Significance of the Lands beyond the Prut for the History of the Romanians and for Romanian Folklore." The second brochure is the published version of a speech held in Bucharest on May 16, 1912, entitled "On the Occasion of the Commemoration of Bessarabia's Loss."

⁸¹ N. Iorga, *Cuvântarea ținută în București, la 16 mai 1912, cu prilejul centenarului pierderii Basarabiei* [Speech held in Bucharest on May 16, 1812: On the occasion of the commemoration of Bessarabia's loss] (Bucharest: Neamul Românesc, 1912), 5.

tradition linking them historically to the present and, perhaps, to an ahistorical, primordial temporality.⁸²

The second level of Iorga's argument represents a perfect analogy to the Russian insistence on historical rights. The major difference is the national frame of the Romanian version and, predictably, the central opposition between the autochthonous character of the Romanians (expressed through both material and spiritual artifacts that permeate the land of Bessarabia) and the transience and shallowness of the foreign presence in the region (containing xenophobic overtones). One of the most coherent examples of this discourse is the following:

Romanian monuments, Romanian memories, Romanian fields [*ogoare*], Romanian rights—are to be found at every step. The cohabiting nations: Ruthenians [*Rusneci*] from the Hotin region, Russians who arrived from beyond the Dniester, Bulgarians who fled from beyond the Danube, for fear of the punishing Turks, Old Believers [*Lipoveni*] exiled as far as possible from the official Orthodoxy, Germans seeking privileges and quick enrichment—all of them possess . . . only the antiquity of a hundred years that have elapsed since the 1812 treaty and the significance, historical rights, and moral sense that can result from the presence of at most three generations on the same land.⁸³

The theme of fundamental belonging that is developed in a potent rhetorical mix of positive and negative self-promoting arguments is restated in the second work with the same poignancy, and here the direct challenge to the Russian image of Bessarabia is even more pronounced. Reflecting upon the implications of the commemoration for the Romanian public, Iorga describes the same difference between the superficial nature of official Russian society and the inalienable rights inherent in the inexpressible “national spirit” of the peasantry: “We are talking about things that *we do possess* [Iorga's emphasis]. If possessing a country means sending there one's frontier soldiers, police, card-playing and drunken officials, then Bessarabia is not ours. If, on the other hand, this means cultivating all its fields [*ogoarele*], embodying all its labor, providing all its defenders—then Bessarabia belongs to us, and not to the others.”⁸⁴

Iorga's brand of traditionalist populism displayed its particular features when addressing the issue of Bessarabia. These features are discernible in three important ways in the texts under discussion. First, he makes extensive use of the typical contrast between the virtues of the primitive peas-

⁸² N. Iorga, *Însemnătatea ținuturilor de peste Prut pentru istoria Românilor și pentru folclorul românesc* [The significance of the lands beyond the Prut for the history of the Romanians and for Romanian folklore] (Bucharest: Socce, 1912), 3.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸⁴ Iorga, *Cuvântarea ținută în București, la 16 mai 1912, cu prilejul centenarului*, 4.

antry, which represents the exclusive bearer of authenticity, and the corrupting and destructive influence of modernity.⁸⁵ The Bessarabian noble savage preserved a purity that was already lost by that time in Romania due to the onrush of “Western forms.”⁸⁶ This purity, in fact, embodied the essence of Bessarabia’s future contribution to the “complete icon” of the whole Romanian people, of which Bessarabia represented a part and a “special chapter.”⁸⁷

The second area where Iorga exhibits his mix of nationalism and populism is in the role he ascribes to the local Bessarabian and Romanian elites in the loss of Bessarabia. The portrait that he draws of the Bessarabian and Moldavian nobility cannot be reduced to a clear-cut image. On the one hand, he is careful to inform the reader that “among the boyar families that remained under Russian domination following the annexation . . . not all forfeited their land in order to lose themselves in the world of officials or spenders of inherited money from the immense Empire.”⁸⁸ On the other hand, Iorga’s primary criterion for assessing the significance of the “boyar class” is their degree of national consciousness, a test that the Moldavian elite clearly did not pass in 1812. He thus severely criticizes what he perceives as the irresponsible behavior of the Moldavian boyars at the moment of the annexation: “The Moldavian boyar class of 1812 had no [collective] consciousness, thus breaking the duty of any dominant class to encompass and express all the memories, all the hopes, all the [historical] rights, all the pride and honor of a people.”⁸⁹

The third element that demonstrates to what extent the historian’s view of Bessarabia was indebted to his populist-traditionalist outlook is his attitude toward social change in general and revolution in particular. Since revolution is ultimately a result of the modernity that Iorga rejects, any socially based program of national liberation is for him not only contradictory, but unfeasible and pernicious. He focuses his argument on the principle of class solidarity (based on ethnic homogeneity) that appears as the only realistic strategy to transform the Romanian Kingdom into a future “Piedmont” (in C. Stere’s words) for other territories inhabited by Romanians. He is quick to clarify his position at the outset of his speech on the 1912 events, rejecting the notion of “lamentation and sighing” as the defining feature of Romania’s reaction to the Russian anniversary. Those credited with spreading such defeatist moods among the Romanian public do so, according to Iorga, in the form of an “impertinent revolutionary mani-

⁸⁵ Iorga, *Însemnătatea ținuturilor de peste Prut*, 5.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 1, 6.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸⁹ Iorga, *Cuvântarea ținută în București, la 16 mai 1912*, 9.

festó” written on “red paper.”⁹⁰ The anti-revolutionary stance advocated by Iorga can be linked to a national conservatism and anti-modern skepticism that places his ostensibly populist rhetoric closer to contemporary conservative ideologies than to doctrines of social activism (either Populist or Social Democratic).

A final, important problem concerns the comparative dimension of Iorga’s work. Unsurprisingly, Bessarabia’s loss is compared to the annexation of Alsace and Lorraine by the German Empire.⁹¹ In an interesting twist of the argument supporting Russia’s claim to rule Bessarabia, Iorga stresses the absence of a Romanian national state that could rightfully cede Bessarabia to Russia in 1812. Making a virtue out of necessity, Iorga resorts to a revealing distinction between state and nation, contrary to his usual position, in order to absolve the nation of guilt.⁹² The historian’s didactic examples of a better understanding of national trauma did not end there, however. He drew a more direct comparison with Sweden’s loss of Finland in order to underscore the factors that could transform Romania into a viable competitor for the allegiance of its “alienated brothers,” but also to revert to the argument concerning the nefarious role of local elites.⁹³ Such comparisons indicated a trend toward a more comprehensive, albeit one-sided, view of Bessarabia as a particular case in a wider clash between the principles of nationality and empire that informed much of the discourse of Romanian intellectuals in the early twentieth century.

The conservative voices in Romanian politics did not monopolize the public sphere with regard to the “Bessarabian question.” In his report on May 21, 1912, the Russian envoy to Bucharest, A. Lysakovskii, mentions the active protests by “the Socialist Party,” dominated by a more radical and “brutal” (*rezkie*) anti-Russian discourse.⁹⁴ The Socialists’ meeting, held in a central Bucharest venue, included politically charged speeches by prominent Romanian Socialist ideologues and activists, such as Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea and Christian Rakovski, and by Bessarabian-born political émigrés. The speakers emphasized the critical situation of the Bessarabian Romanians and also analyzed Russian imperial policies in other non-Russian regions, thus providing a rare comparative dimension.⁹⁵ From

⁹⁰ Ibid., 3.

⁹¹ Ibid., 5–6.

⁹² Ibid., 6–7.

⁹³ Ibid., 9.

⁹⁴ AVPRI, fond 151, Politarkhiv, op. 482, d. 695, l. 63 verso.

⁹⁵ Ibid. The Romanian Socialists included a number of Russian-born political émigrés who were among the first public figures in Romania to seriously discuss Bessarabia in the context of Russian imperial policies. They published the first Romanian periodical specifically devoted to Bessarabian topics (*Besarabia*, 1879),

April to June 1912, a series of articles concerning Bessarabia and the nationalities policy of the Russian Empire were published in the Socialist press, mainly in the *România Muncitoare* newspaper. In his “chronicle” of the “Bucharest of yesteryear,” the Socialist-leaning journalist Constantin Bacalbaşa claimed that among the plethora of commemorative activities organized in May 1912, “the protest of the Socialist Party against the theft of Bessarabia had the greatest significance.”⁹⁶

The 1912 anniversary also triggered reactions among the wider Romanian public. Unfortunately, a detailed discussion of the many didactic publications printed on this occasion is beyond the scope of this work.⁹⁷ The visions of Bessarabia articulated in popular publications generally lacked complexity and privileged the “discourse of lamentation” that Iorga, among

which was closed after only fifteen issues due to the insistence of the Russian authorities.

⁹⁶ C. Bacalbaşa, *Bucureştii de altădată* [Bucharest of yesteryear], 2nd ed., vol. 4, 1910–1914 (Bucharest: “Universul” Press, 1936), 87.

⁹⁷ One of the most interesting examples is the diverse but comprehensive collection of didactic texts printed by a Romanian teacher: D. Munteanu-Râmnic, *Pentru Basarabia. Culegere de texte privitoare la ţara, trecutul, literatura şi starea actuală a fraţilor basarabeni* [For Bessarabia: A collection of texts concerning the country, past, literature, and present situation of the Bessarabian brothers] (Ploieşti: Editura Revistei “Curierul Liceului,” 1912). This collection contains a variety of materials that could be divided into the following categories: 1) general historical, geographical, and statistical overviews of a purely descriptive character; 2) excerpts from original literary or scholarly pieces written by or about Bessarabians (this rubric includes mostly fragments of works published by Bessarabian émigrés to Romania, such as B. P. Hasdeu, Z. Arbore, or D. C. Moruzi, as well as a number of texts by N. Iorga, but also features some original examples of prose written in Bessarabia itself); 3) a “historical-political section” based on selections from works of prominent Romanian historians (mostly A. D. Xenopol and N. Iorga) describing the 1812 events. This section also includes official documents connected to the Paris Treaty of 1856 and, of course, some texts pertaining to the Berlin Treaty of 1878; 4) a collection of accounts meant to convey a picture of the “present” (1912) state of Bessarabia (including excerpts from Romanian newspapers on various prominent Bessarabian figures or “cultural events”)—however, one can find here more interesting pieces as well (for example, an article by Iorga on the 1912 anniversary, a fragment of D. Moruzi’s novel *Exiles in a Foreign Country*, or a sample of opinions expressed by N. Durnovo concerning the opportunity to strike a “deal” with Romania through a conciliatory stance on Bessarabia and certain territorial changes); and 5) a final “poetic dedication” consisting of a number of poems reclaiming Bessarabia for the Romanian “national body” (represented through appropriate organic metaphors as, for example, in the final poem where Bessarabia is depicted as a “beloved sister” wearing a “blood mantle” and bearing a “weeping heart” in its “chest”).

others, found grossly inadequate. Alternatively, Romanian claims to Bessarabia were discussed from a purely historical perspective, as in the brochure published by A. D. Xenopol.⁹⁸ Despite these shortcomings, the emergence of such examples of didactic literature oriented toward a wider audience signaled the qualitatively new role that the “Bessarabian question” had acquired within the broader Romanian national narrative. It would be an exaggeration, however, to insist on the centrality of the Bessarabian topic in the overall scheme of Romanian nation-building before World War I. Nevertheless, the 1912 anniversary laid the foundation for the first coherent attempt at symbolically constructing Bessarabia as Romanian land in direct opposition to Russian discourse. The importance of 1912 can be gauged from the prominent place given to the events in works subsequently published during World War I.⁹⁹

In conclusion, the 1912 ceremonies performed in the Russian Empire had a number of unanticipated consequences, among which Bessarabia’s placement on the map of the Romanian intellectual community had the most far-reaching impact. However, this tendency would only reach its apex during World War I when the interests of the articulators of the nation converged with the pragmatic interests of state leadership, unexpectedly propelling the “Bessarabian question” to the forefront of national politics.

⁹⁸ A. D. Xenopol, *Centenarul răpirii Basarabiei* [One hundred years since the theft of Bessarabia] (Iași: “Adevărul,” 1912).

⁹⁹ For example, in the very interesting book authored by Vasile D. Moisiu, *Știri din Basarabia de astăzi* [News from today’s Bessarabia] (Bucharest: Editura C. Sfetea, 1915), esp. 160–67.

CHAPTER IV

Three Hypostases of the “Bessarabian Refugee”: Hasdeu, Stere, Moruzi and the Uncertainty of Identity

This chapter focuses on the works of three Romanian intellectuals and publicists of Bessarabian origin who articulated different visions of Bessarabia: Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, Constantin Stere, and Dimitrie C. Moruzi. The first two attained prominent positions in Romanian academic and political circles, while the third languished on the margins of the Romanian bureaucracy, but nevertheless wrote one of the most poignant and forceful accounts of the Romanian irredentist stance regarding Bessarabia. Each of these men embodied a certain stage in Romania's symbolic appropriation and incorporation of Bessarabia into the national body politic. Hasdeu was closely associated with the Romantic period's “search for origins” and the close interaction of history and philology that was characteristic of the earliest “national awakenings” in Eastern Europe. Conversely, Stere remained very much immersed in the populist rhetoric that shaped his experience in Russia and his later political affiliations in Romania. Finally, Moruzi was much closer to state-centered nationalism and at the same time acutely aware of the importance of mass politics for the mobilization of the national agenda. The major difference between his outlook and Stere's was the active role Moruzi envisaged for the masses in the destruction of multinational empires since he believed that a “world of nations” was a historical inevitability. The ideas of these writers were both more complex and eclectic than this categorization might suggest. The distinction between the three authors is merely an indicator of the larger intellectual and political trends that informed their opinions. The differences in their readings of Bessarabia's place within the Romanian national narrative and of the Russian Empire as the quintessential “other” are, however, too conspicuous to ignore and thus call for a careful comparison of their views.

Hasdeu's contributions to the discussion of the “Bessarabian question” should be read in light of his implicit references to his experience as a native of Bessarabia and as a student in Russian universities that shaped his

early career in Romania. Even more telling are his rare pronouncements on the Russian Empire that were not explicit in most of his literary and historical works or in his public role as a scholar and intellectual. However, scholars do possess two examples of his writings that help one to assess his attitude toward the Russian Empire as a hostile and even alien environment. One of them is a short piece ostensibly devoted to a critique of Tolstoy's story "The Kreutzer Sonata," but which serves as an allegory of Russia through the animalization of its inhabitants. This story can be read in various ways, but it clearly points to Hasdeu's predilection for biological metaphors to better convey Russia's otherness. His criticism of Russian mores transcends the social realm and shifts to an ontological level. A later example pointing in the same direction, albeit with a more explicitly political thrust, is a short piece in which he severely criticizes the Russian autocracy by comparing its "universalistic" pretensions to the discredited claims of the Roman papacy.¹ Hasdeu's views are thus more difficult to reduce to a single ideology, but the assistance he provided to Bessarabian refugees as well as his ambiguous status in Romanian academia made him a central figure in this group.

The other two figures belonged to a later generation and reflected the shifts in Romanian national discourse in the early twentieth century. Thus, Stere's position on the "Bessarabian question" was determined by his active political involvement in the region both before and especially after the 1905 Revolution and his much more activist social stance, which never moved beyond populism.² Dimitrie Moruzi, a scion of the Moruzi family born in Bessarabia and later an émigré to Romania, has a special place within the triad discussed here. A mediocre writer of novels and short stories who was supported intellectually and financially by Nicolae Iorga, Moruzi made his literary debut in 1905 at the age of fifty-five with a brochure entitled *Russians and Romanians*³ and later published several novels presented as monographs on Bessarabian society. In his aforementioned booklet and in a series of articles on the "contemporary situation of Bessarabia" (presumably in the early twentieth century), Moruzi draws a picture of Bessarabia that curiously elides elements of "national characterol-

¹ B. P. Hasdeu, *Papa de la Neva: Conferință ținută la Ateneul Român în ziua de 7 decembrie 1901* [The Neva Pope: A conference held at the Romanian Athenaeum on December 7, 1901]. Bucharest: Editura Societății Tinerimea Română, 1901.

² Stere's most interesting works from which his particular image of Bessarabia emerges include his partly autobiographical novel, *În preajma revoluției*, and especially his collection of polemical articles written during World War I and grouped under the title *Marele război și politica României* [The Great War and Romania's policy] (Bucharest: Lumina, 1918), esp. chapter three.

³ Recently published in a new edition as Dumitru C. Moruzi, *Rușii și românii* [The Russians and the Romanians] (Chișinău: Museum, 2001).

ogy," personal impressions, and political and social criticism, resulting in a clear argument in favor of Romanian irredentist claims with prophetic generalizations about the coming triumph of nationalities in their struggle with multinational empires. Strangely neglected at the time of their publication despite Iorga's insistent promotion, these works amount to one of the most coherent, albeit rather unsophisticated, applications of Romanian national discourse to Bessarabia prior to World War I. Moruzi thus added a new dimension that was politically conservative yet nationalistically assertive to the body of early twentieth-century Romanian visions of Bessarabia.

The different yet compatible visions of Bessarabia exhibited in the works of these three authors are but one major aspect of their substantial contributions to the Romanian national narrative. A much larger, underlying topic behind the symbolic construction of Bessarabia concerns the interpretation of Russian reality in its broader features. In a sense, one can distinguish between two separate yet closely interrelated objects of these authors' gaze: Bessarabia proper and the Russian Empire, which represented the wider, alien environment into which the region was thrust due to the machinations of international diplomacy. Russia, in fact, constituted a fascinating and distorting mirror that reflected their frustrations and expectations with regard to Romania's future development. The depiction of Romania's giant eastern neighbor as the quintessential "other" allowed them to gloss over the similarities between the two societies, which did not escape the attention of less emotional Russian observers, and develop an understanding of the "national self" built in explicit opposition to an "Asiatic" and menacing foreign force. The theme of Orientalism as it was metaphorically construed—ranging from Hasdeu's ironic biological analogies to Moruzi's undisguised condemnation of Russian despotism to Stere's overtly political analysis—was by no means absent from the picture. The various visions of the Russian Empire articulated by the three authors were thus more striking in terms of their political differences than for any purported social or political reality beyond Romania's eastern borders.

A second argument centers on the psychological dimensions of the phenomenon of the "Bessarabian refugee" and emphasizes these émigrés' multiple and ambiguous personal and group identities in the Romanian context. A fruitful theoretical framework that might be applied in this case is the concept of stigma, first elaborated by Erving Goffman⁴ and then adapted to the Romanian case through the insightful analysis of Sorin Antohi, who uses the notion of "ethnic stigma" to discuss some of the most compelling and long-standing images of Romanian "self-negativity" articu-

⁴ Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 1990).

lated in the twentieth century.⁵ In the case of the Bessarabian émigrés, one cannot accept the general meaning of “ethnic stigma” as a profoundly negative and traumatizing self-image. The three authors discussed here ostensibly developed an optimistic and progressive vision of the nation. However, on a personal level the marginalization of these Bessarabian-born national ideologues revealed the most characteristic features of stigma. It is important to remember that stigma “always depends on a relational ensemble, on a background of values and connotations.”⁶ The marginal status of these intellectuals derived from their imperfect integration into the Romanian nation. One can thus posit a peculiar case of regional stigma that was present in different ways in all three individuals. The Bessarabians’ problematic identity was due to their association with the menacing world of Russianness, which accentuated their foreignness.

Hasdeu had perhaps the most complicated relationship vis-à-vis his past experiences in Russia, and he sought to transcend his stigmatized status by completely identifying himself with the cause of “Romanianism” and by placing the most unequivocally Romanian region of Oltenia at the top of his hierarchy of national territories. Stere, however, managed to convert his marginal status as a political prisoner in the Russian Empire into a source of self-legitimization in Romania. His case is also emblematic of the ultimate failure of this strategy since he was constantly perceived as a threat to the political system due to his foreign roots, which were often presented in starkly psychological terms. Stere also used the rhetorical device of self-stigmatization in wartime polemics with his political opponents.

However, the limits of applying the notion of ethnic stigma to the present case are also apparent. As Antohi emphasizes, ethnic stigma in the Romanian context pertains to an “extreme [version] of the Westernizing current” and represents “the negative copy of the litany of ethno-national ego.”⁷ Moreover, the Westernizers were those who claimed to have a “discursive monopoly on ethnic stigma” and therefore “repressed almost any positive reference to their own nation.”⁸ If anything, our three nation-builders were on the opposite side of the intellectual spectrum. Even Stere, who was arguably the best placed to contest the triumphalist national narrative from within, eventually succumbed to its logic and rhetoric. Thus, ethnic stigma mostly functioned at a personal level and gave birth to a series of compensatory strategies that shaped their self-images and their rela-

⁵ Antohi, *Civitas imaginalis: Istorie și utopie în cultura română*, esp. the essay “Cioran și stigmatul românesc: Mecanisme identitare și definiții radicale ale etnicității,” 235–324.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 268.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 294.

tionship to the nation, but did not lead to the articulation of full-fledged national or regional (negative) self-images.

All three authors experienced some kind of marginality within the Romanian establishment that shaped their political affiliations and literary preoccupations. Hasdeu's ambiguous position vis-à-vis the Russian regime is one case in point. Though ostensibly (and probably sincerely) highly critical of Russian society and the Russian government, he was rather reserved when his personal interests or scholarly prestige were at stake due to his unclear legal status in Russia, including the dubious circumstances of his emigration to Romania, or his acceptance of membership in the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences. In the same vein, Stere's ambiguous political position, which became more complicated after World War I, and Moruzi's unsuccessful efforts to integrate into Romanian public life, attest to the persistence of a stigma (whether real or perceived) that structured their discourse. Rather than dwell on the psychological dimension, the following pages will examine the interplay of social, cultural, political, and biographical factors that contributed to the peculiar situation of these émigrés in Romania. The intermingling of their discourse on Bessarabia with criticism of contemporary Romanian society deserves greater attention, and such an approach might provide useful insights, if not a complete picture of their intellectual trajectories. Without ignoring other prominent personalities from the émigré group (such as Zamfir Arbore-Rally) or the accounts of lesser-known authors from the Old Kingdom, a focus on the works of these authors will provide a detailed picture of an important segment of Romanian national discourse concerning Bessarabia and introduce previously unexplored topics and variations.

Hasdeu—The Romantic Nationalist

The intellectual tradition inaugurated and continued by Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu is fundamental for Romanian national discourse not so much due to his excessive focus on Bessarabia, but because of his “radical transformation of nationalism and liberalism as ideological frameworks of Romanian political thinking.”⁹ In strictly political terms, Hasdeu is very difficult to characterize in relation to the dominant liberal and conservative tendencies in late nineteenth-century Romania. In a recent work, one scholar has rightly emphasized that “Hasdeu in political and cultural terms continued the romantic-liberal heritage” (commonly labeled in Romanian historiography as *pașoptism*), but, at the same time, guided this intellectual legacy in

⁹ Balázs Trencsényi, “National Characterology in the Romanian Political Discourses of the Nineteenth Century” (unpublished conference paper, We the People project workshop, CEU, Budapest, November 11–12, 2005), 25.

“a more directly ethnicist direction.”¹⁰ The Bessarabian-born thinker is also important for his role in articulating one of the most poignant visions of the Romanian “national character,” based on the intertwining and the reinterpretation of the connections between “the political projects, the historical narratives and the normative discourse of the ‘national self.’”¹¹ As the same author stresses, “Hasdeu’s example is also paradigmatic for the complex processes of cultural transfer characterizing the emerging national ideologies of East-Central and South-Eastern Europe.”¹² The issue of cultural transfers in Hasdeu’s case is crucial for understanding the mechanisms that influenced the context in which national discourses competing for preeminence with their imperial rivals came to the fore. In fact, the intellectual environment of the Russian Empire had a clear impact on young Hasdeu’s mindset, despite his later disclaimers that his Russian experience left no mark upon him. His assertions that no teacher at Kharkov University, which he attended before emigrating to the Romanian Principalities in 1857, had influenced him in any way and that he “considered all of them to be enemies only because they were Muscovites”¹³ were meant to strengthen his credentials as a staunch nationalist even in his youth. This persistent denial of any intellectual debts to his pre-Romanian period also served psychological, compensatory functions in his struggle for acceptance into the Romanian intellectual milieu where he was periodically accused of Russophilia.

Several aspects concerning Hasdeu’s intellectual and academic career in Romania should be clarified in order to situate him within the social milieu of his epoch and to assess his place within the Romanian national narrative. The traditional perspective on Hasdeu’s intellectual trajectory emphasizes his evolution from a purely Romantic period, consisting of his early years in Iași and then in Bucharest (roughly between 1858/1860 and 1872), followed by a more pragmatic, scientific tendency that dominated his scholarly output between 1872 and 1886. Following a series of professional and personal crises in the late 1880s, Hasdeu finally succumbed to a spiritualist infatuation with the paranormal that led to further personal and academic isolation and gave birth to the myth of an imposing but solitary figure whose genius remained too unsystematic and self-centered to yield any significant long-term results.¹⁴ This fragmentation of Hasdeu’s contribu-

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 26.

¹³ Eufrosina Dvoicenco, *Începuturile literare ale lui B. P. Hasdeu* [Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu’s literary beginnings] (Bucharest: Fundația Regele Carol II, 1936), 24.

¹⁴ This image was successfully and insistently propagated by Nicolae Iorga, who was one of Hasdeu’s main rivals in the arena of nationalist politics in Romania in the

tions to Romania's cultural evolution neglects not only certain underlying continuities in his national vision, but also his role as a public figure and a leader of one of several major currents struggling to dominate Romania's intellectual scene in this period.

The revisionist reading of Hasdeu was initially undertaken by the interwar generation of right-wing Romanian intellectuals and crystallized in a critical edition published by Mircea Eliade in 1937.¹⁵ Eliade's reconstruction of Hasdeu's significance is based on two premises that the editor develops in his lengthy and highly personal preface. The reappropriation of this forgotten author appeared necessary, first, in his hagiography as a nationalist "prophet" and thinker, and, second, due to the "universal" relevance of Hasdeu's work, which displayed a remarkably holistic and "magical" intuition of the world that no other Romanian writer ever equaled.¹⁶ Hasdeu was also interesting for the interwar nationalist tradition given the encyclopedic character of his work and the widely comparative method that he used in his philological and historical treatises. Given the 1930s generation's tendency to put Romanian culture on par with the European tradition, the monumentality of Hasdeu's intellectual legacy seemed an appropriate starting point for infusing this culture with the universalism that it lacked.¹⁷

Beyond this partial reevaluation through a nationalist and universal-comparative lens, the main point of interest is Hasdeu's position within the contemporary intellectual debates of his time. Only during the last several years have scholars attempted to analyze his impact on Romania's "public spirit." In this sense, it would be appropriate to speak of an emerging "second revisionist" view of Hasdeu as a public intellectual, timidly inaugurated two decades ago¹⁸ and drawn to its logical conclusion in two mono-

final years of the nineteenth century. As recent investigations have shown, Iorga's relationship with Hasdeu was neither as univocal nor as uncompromising as is customarily believed. Hasdeu's influence on Iorga will be discussed later.

¹⁵ B. P. Hasdeu, *Scrieri literare, morale și politice* [Literary, moral, and political writings], ed. Mircea Eliade (Bucharest: Fundația Regele Carol II, 1937).

¹⁶ Mircea Eliade, *Despre Eminescu și Hasdeu* [Concerning Eminescu and Hasdeu], ed. Mircea Handoca (Iași: Junimea, 1987), 59–104. In his concluding remarks, Eliade forcefully reiterates this point: "By restoring the Romantic vision to its true axis—that of magic—Hasdeu is not only our most profound Romantic, but he is also one of the most significant figures of European Romanticism. After Novalis, he is the only one who had such a perfect and coherent, magical intuition of the world." In the context of the totalizing and irrational tendencies amply represented in the thought of the European Right in the 1930s, Eliade's interpretation is hardly surprising.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 59–60.

¹⁸ Vistian Goia, *B. P. Hasdeu și discipolii săi* [B. P. Hasdeu and his disciples] (Iași: Junimea, 1987).

graphs by the Cluj historian Ovidiu Pecican.¹⁹ The main thrust of the revisionist argument rests, first, on the full-fledged restoration of Hasdeu's role as a mainstream nationalist thinker along the lines of the tradition inaugurated by the 1848 generation; and second, on the attempt to prove the existence of a nationalist current based in Bucharest with Hasdeu at its helm that was opposed to the critically minded "Junimist school" and to the emerging Social Democratic circles grouped around the *Contemporanul* review led by Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea. The implications of this rewriting of Romania's late nineteenth-century intellectual history are fundamental since Hasdeu's transformation from a solitary and eccentric figure into one of Romania's main nation-builders goes against conventional wisdom, which maintains that the Junimea circle dictated the tendencies and norms of the country's scholarly and literary standards up to the early twentieth century, thereby providing the formative framework for such prophets of Romanian nationalism as Eminescu and Iorga.

Contrary to this view, Pecican goes as far as to argue that "[The 'Hasdeu school'] dominated Romanian public life during the last decades of the nineteenth century due to the success of their reception. Their combined nationalist and scholarly undertakings served as a 'guide' to the most delicate questions of the [Romanian] Kingdom's development. With regard to this state of affairs, both *Junimea* and *Contemporanul* represented formidable reactions—through their constant criticism, through the quality of their collaborators, through the alternatives they suggested—but mere reactions nonetheless."²⁰ If one were to draw a line of succession that would restore Hasdeu's appropriate stature within the Romanian intellectual realm of the period, his school would be the link between the liberal nationalism of 1848—epitomized by such figures as Nicolae Bălcescu²¹ in the sphere of scholarship or I. C. Brătianu, M. Kogălniceanu, and C. A. Rosetti in politics—and the integral nationalism of the early twentieth century found in the "samanatorist" doctrine of Nicolae Iorga. In one of Mircea Eliade's astute remarks, even Eminescu, despite his conservative credentials and his open affiliation with Junimea, is reclaimed for the nationalist tradition embodied in the aforementioned figures and is thus included within Hasdeu's

¹⁹ Ovidiu Pecican, *Hasdeenii: O odisee a receptării* [The Hasdeians: An odyssey of reception] (Cluj: Grinta, 2003), and Ovidiu Pecican, *B. P. Hasdeu istoric* [B. P. Hasdeu as an historian] (Cluj: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2004).

²⁰ Pecican, *Hasdeenii: O odisee a receptării*, 160.

²¹ For a detailed and cogent analysis of Hasdeu's intellectual relatedness to Bălcescu, see Pecican's work *B.P. Hasdeu istoric*, cited above. Pecican squarely rejects the opinion stressing Bălcescu's direct "influence" on Hasdeu and postulates an intellectual affinity that can be traced to common sources and preoccupations rather than to a direct encounter. He concludes that Bălcescu's influence on Hasdeu is at best a "minor" one. See Pecican, *B. P. Hasdeu istoric*, 56–63.

sphere of influence, if not directly into his school.²² Although this categorization is the result of a retrospective construction of a national canon that favored continuity instead of rupture, it points to the radicalization of the national narrative and to the importance of the autochthonist, xenophobic, and anti-Semitic features in Hasdeu's doctrine that set him apart from the liberal mainstream. Hasdeu's political radicalism, however, was never matched by a corresponding social emphasis, a fact that created the potential for the conservative reworking of his theses by Eminescu and, to a lesser degree, Iorga.

The intellectual path that Hasdeu followed after his emigration to Romania was hardly a smooth one. After spending the first five years of his Romanian period in Iași (1858–63), he moved to Bucharest where his academic and journalistic career reached its apex between 1868 and the early 1890s. His personal feuds with Titu Maiorescu, the leader of the Junimea circle, which did not fully form until 1866, as well as Hasdeu's negative attitude toward the cultural trends emerging in Moldavia's former capital, all dated from the early 1860s.²³ His failure to integrate himself into the Iași intellectual milieu, as well as the public scandals involving several of his scholarly and literary publications,²⁴ intensified his resentment toward the Moldavian critical intellectuals grouped around Junimea and his open bias toward the Wallachian intellectual milieu. This early period also witnessed the development of Hasdeu's peculiar strategy of creating his own periodi-

²² M. Eliade, *Despre Eminescu și Hasdeu*, 61.

²³ In this context, Pecican addressed the problem of the emergence of the “Junimea” current as an expression of the “cultural frustration” experienced by the Iași establishment after the city lost its political importance in the 1860s. While the wider implications of Pecican's thesis seem doubtful, a certain “frustration” in Hasdeu's case is clearly identifiable. See Pecican, *Hasdeenii: O odisee a receptării*, 189–91.

²⁴ I, of course, do not aim to overemphasize the personal factor as an explanatory tool, but the link between Hasdeu's personal and professional mishaps during his “Iași period” and his later rabid (and unsubstantiated) attacks against Junimea cannot be ignored. The persistent accusations of “cosmopolitanism” leveled at Maiorescu and his collaborators are not unrelated to Hasdeu's resentment toward the Iași intellectuals and Maiorescu personally. The public outrage was caused, first, by Hasdeu's article *Perit-au dacii?* [Did the Dacians perish?] (1860) in which he launched a virulent attack on the dominant “Latinist” theory. Hasdeu was forced to abandon his article halfway through because of protests. Second, the publication of a short novel (partly inspired by Russian Romantic influences) led to the official accusation of immorality and ended in a lawsuit. Despite his acquittal, Hasdeu lost the chair he held in Iași. In this context, he was also accused of having veiled Russophile and separatist leanings (due to the title of one of his journals, *Din Moldova* [From Moldavia], which he later changed to *Lumina* [The Light]). Thus, his marginality in Romania was rhetorically reinforced.

cals without direct political affiliations. It must be emphasized, however, that Hasdeu was much less successful institutionally than his “Junimist” rivals in forging a circle akin to the Iași group that revolved around the *Convorbiri Literare* journal.²⁵

Hasdeu’s career fully developed only after he moved to Bucharest in 1864. The problem of the aggregation of the nationalist current based in Bucharest and guided by Hasdeu thus can only be of scholarly interest after the point when he consolidated his position and published his major work from the early Romantic period, the monograph *Ioan Vodă cel Cumplit* [John the Terrible] (1865). In a slightly apologetic vein, the historian Ovidiu Pecican indicates this date as the moment when Hasdeu “acquired an important position in Romania’s cultural life, having the advantage of espousing a set of firm political attitudes. These can be summarized under the labels: unionism [that is, support for the union of the Principalities], nationalism, anti-Semitism, and a pro-Cuza [pro-government] attitude.”²⁶ This convoluted phrase indicates some of the major continuities in Hasdeu’s thinking—for example, his rejection of any kind of localism and his xenophobic and liberal tendencies—that were also characteristic of his school. A more sober assessment insists on “three important moments [that] distinguish the creation of Hasdeu’s group: 1869–70, when the scholar becomes president of the “Românismul” Society and gathers his first adherents; 1873, when they are joined by the journalists from the *Contemporary Review* [Revista Contimporană], headed by V. A. Urechia; and, finally, 1887, when the *Revista Nouă* [The New Review] is launched and the last disciples join the group.”²⁷ The major problem in identifying the exact profile of the movement formed under Hasdeu’s patronage is not so much connected to his own contributions, but rather to the intellectual abilities of his disciples, who were minor figures in the late nineteenth century. The core of his following in Bucharest consisted of diverse intellectual profiles, including historians (G. Tocilescu, G. I. Ionescu-Gion), linguists and philologists (L. Șăineanu, N. Apostolescu, I. Bărbulescu), folklorists

²⁵ Hasdeu’s journalistic activity in his early period led to the publication of a series of short-lived journals that he wrote almost single-handedly: *România* [Romania] (Dec. 1858–Jan. 1859); *Foaia de storia română* [Review of Romanian history] (1859); *Foița de istorie și literatură* [Historical and literary leaflet] (March–July 1860); and, most importantly, *Din Moldova/Lumina* [From Moldavia/The light] (1862–63). All these publications, though ephemeral, had an encyclopedic character and displayed both Hasdeu’s eclecticism and his monumental plans. For more details, see Liviu Marian, *Activitatea publicistică a lui B. P. Hasdeu* [B. P. Hasdeu’s journalistic activity] (Chișinău, 1932), esp. 4–10.

²⁶ Pecican, *Hasdeenii: O odisee a receptării*, 168.

²⁷ Goia, *B. P. Hasdeu și discipolii săi*, 18.

and ethnographers, and political journalists who embraced a nationalist credo and put themselves in opposition to the “Junimist” faction.²⁸

Hasdeu’s image as a solitary and overbearing personality was largely the product of the group’s unequal scholarly output and the lack of an organized nucleus in the form of a stable periodical or circle structure. The largely informal character of Hasdeu’s movement does not negate its fundamental role in shaping the national narrative of Romanian intellectuals. The period between the late 1860s and the early 1890s witnessed constant competition for preeminence within the Romanian public sphere in which Hasdeu played the part of an impressive, if at times awkward, establishment thinker of the liberal camp. The radical nationalist tendencies visible in much of his work made him unsuitable for politics, but his anti-aristocratic and populist pronouncements clearly differentiated him from contemporary conservatives. There was a peculiar division of intellectual labor between the “Junimist” penchant for literary criticism and philosophical meditation and the historical-philological thrust of Hasdeu’s school. The fascination with the national past and the constant emotion that Hasdeu and his epigones felt when approaching this uncharted field were as much a reflection of the Romanticism that pervaded their worldview as a continuity with the 1848-generation’s priorities that they assumed as their own.

The transition from Hasdeu’s school to the nationalist current dominated by Nicolae Iorga in the early twentieth century is another contentious point. After focusing on his academic activities and attempting to reenter politics, which he abandoned in the early 1870s,²⁹ for a brief period in the mid-1880s, Hasdeu relaunched his cultural offensive through the most significant publication that he patronized—*Revista Nouă* (1887–95). This journal represented the most serious attempt to form an organized circle of like-minded intellectuals grouped under his aegis. Despite the initial suc-

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁹ The apex of Hasdeu’s involvement in national politics coincided with the turbulent period between 1866 and 1871 when Romania’s emerging political system found itself in a state of instability and acute crisis. During this interval, Hasdeu founded two of his most important “political” journals—*Traian* [Trajan], which appeared from March 1869 until February 1870, and *Columna lui Traian* [Trajan’s column] (1870–83), which started as a politically oriented publication but gradually assumed a scholarly character. The transformation was definitive by the mid-1870s. This transition coincided with the most fruitful period in Hasdeu’s scholarly output, characterized by positivist tendencies and resulting in large-scale projects, the most revealing example being his unfinished *Istoria critică a românilor* [A critical history of the Romanians] (1873–75). Hasdeu’s political credo, which he defined as a “national-democratic” program, was epitomized by the slogan “Romanianism in democracy, democracy in Romanianism.”

cess of the project, the early 1890s witnessed Hasdeu's gradual retreat from the public arena into self-imposed seclusion caused as much by personal reasons (the death of his only daughter) as by the growing competition in the field of nationalist politics. The effective disappearance of the movement under his leadership was signaled by the journal's suspension in 1895, followed by his gradual retirement from public life.³⁰

Despite the apparent sterility of his scholarly and militant nationalist activity, Hasdeu's intellectual legacy had a clear impact on the early twentieth-century integral nationalism of Iorga. Pecican has rightly emphasized that "even on the ideological level, the ideas of nationality, 'Romanianism,' cultural and political unity, which Hasdeu and his disciples borrowed from the preceding [1848] generation, were continued in a new context by Iorga and the other militants grouped in the 'League for Cultural Unity.'"³¹ Along the same lines, Pecican posits a direct continuity between Hasdeu's and Iorga's Romantic vision of history and also between certain points in their nationalist doctrines, among which the veneration for national origins, the idealization of the peasantry, and the pronounced anti-Semitism of both authors stand out. This analysis, however convincing, fails to address the question of the phases of development in Romanian nationalist thought and does not clarify to what extent these commonalities can be traced to a continuity as opposed to the authors' immersion in a similar discursive field that could better explain such "common ground."³² The most important conclusion that one can draw from the late period of Hasdeu's activity is the identification of a transition period between 1891 and 1906 that marked the transformation of the liberal and Romantic stance that dominated Hasdeu's school into the more conservative (though no less radical, in nationalist terms) vision of nationhood advocated by Iorga and his supporters.

The identification of Romantic elements in Hasdeu's conception of the Romanian national self may prove to be problematic not only due to the notoriously unclear definition of the Romantic current, but also because of the peculiarity of the intellectual context in which he was educated in his youth. According to Pecican, "the Romanian historiographic tradition that served as an inspiration for Hasdeu during the period of his school instruction was, undoubtedly, a peripheral one, even in comparison with the his-

³⁰ Thus, in 1897 the Romanian Academy suspended Hasdeu's project to write a complete philological dictionary of the Romanian language; in 1899 he left the directorship of the National Archives, a post he had held since 1876; and in 1900 he vacated his university chair. For more details, see Goia, *B. P. Hasdeu și discipolii săi*, 64.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

³² Pecican, *Hasdeenii: O odisee a receptării*, 209–27.

torical writing of the Romanian Principalities."³³ The peripheral or marginal character of Hasdeu's early scholarly sources and influences turned out to be both an advantage and a liability for his later academic career in Romania. In this sense, Russian Romantic literary models, in addition to the controversies between Slavophiles and Westernizers raging in Russian intellectual circles in the mid-nineteenth century, must be taken into account.³⁴ One can agree with Pecican's conclusion that Hasdeu "was and remained to the end of his life, fundamentally, a Romantic."³⁵ However, his Romanticism was conditioned by several factors—primarily biographical, but also philosophical—that made him somewhat atypical for his Romanian milieu.

First, the prevailing influence exercised by his father, Alexandru Hâjdeu, must be emphasized. Hâjdeu's personality displayed many features of the Romantic type, including a drive toward universality and intellectual polymorphism that was even more pronounced in his son's case. Thus, Mircea Eliade's intuition about a "Romanian encyclopedic tradition," of which Hasdeu was arguably one of the first representatives, can be linked to the Romantic typology that characterized many Eastern European public intellectuals of the nineteenth century. Second, the philosophical sources of Hasdeu's thinking were fundamental for assessing his vision of national characterology and the role of otherness in this construction. In this regard, Pecican states the following: "Similar to a number of Romantic historians, the ideas provided by pre-Romantic philosophers (Vico, Herder) or by German philosophical Romanticism (Hegel, Fichte, Schelling, Schlegel) functioned, in Hasdeu's case, as a general framework that proved to be flexible enough in order to . . . adapt to later [intellectual] acquisitions."³⁶

However, this variety of references led to a persistent tension in Hasdeu's understanding of nationhood. It was "based on the imperative that the real love of humankind was to promote one's own ethnic community [*'propria sa ginte'*] [and] thus tried to bring together the Vicoian-Herderian and the Hegelian construction—harmonizing particularism with universal progress."³⁷ Hasdeu's oscillation between universalism and particularism is hard to decipher, especially since his later appropriation by interwar thinkers was highly selective and consciously downplayed the factor of progress that Hasdeu was never ready to abandon altogether. This ambiguity, however, did not mean that the two parts of the equation for the development

³³ Pecican, *B. P. Hasdeu istoric*, 14.

³⁴ Dvoicenco, *Începuturile literare ale lui B. P. Hasdeu*, 14–15.

³⁵ Pecican, *B. P. Hasdeu istoric*, 45.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

³⁷ Trencsényi, "National Characterology in the Romanian Political Discourses of the Nineteenth Century," 27–28.

of human society were equivalent in Hasdeu's mind. His preferences are made explicit in a series of speeches that he gave in the late 1860s and the early 1870s at the meetings of the Româanismul Society, to which he was elected president in 1869.

His concept of *Românism*, or "Romanianism," is relational par excellence. In other words, it can only exist in opposition to the notion of cosmopolitanism, which, for Hasdeu, is in fact a misnomer for "refined egoism."³⁸ The principle of Romanianism is thus a precondition for the existence of the Romanian nation. Moreover, only through this principle can the "universal truths" of humankind be approached. It is not surprising, then, that Hasdeu declares the opposition between these two phenomena to be not only functional, but ontological: "Romanianism is humanity, freedom, and truth . . . Cosmopolitanism represents egoism, slavery, and lies!"³⁹ In one of his more virulent pronouncements on the same topic, Hasdeu offers a metaphorical definition of cosmopolitanism that encapsulates his nationalist credo: "Let us therefore preserve with a fanatic jealousy this . . . treasure [the national principle] that the pestiferous breath of the demon of monotony could one day forever steal from us, destroying all variety in its steady progress, reducing harmony to a single tone, incarcerating light into a single ray, slaying all originality through imitation, strangling all enthusiasm through apathy, replacing struggle with inertia and confining life to its own tomb!"⁴⁰ Since the progressive development of humanity is only possible through the complete manifestation of each and every one of its national components—here one can again see Herderian and Hegelian themes intertwined—it is only natural that the antagonism between nationalism and cosmopolitanism be shifted to an ontological instead of a purely political level.

It is not clear to what extent the impact of "East-East" transfers can be discerned here, and positing any direct link to contemporary debates in the Russian Empire would be hazardous at best. The balance between particularistic (national) and universalistic principles in Hasdeu's thinking gradually shifted toward the former. Hasdeu's Romanticism thus evolved from a stance that acknowledged the idea of progress to a more organicist position. Though he initially paid lip service to the evolutionary schemes of Henry Thomas Buckle and even Herbert Spencer, the impact of positivist or evolutionist currents on Hasdeu's thinking is difficult to assess. In fact, he constantly

³⁸ B. P. Hasdeu, *Publicistică din ziarul "Traian" (1869–1870)* [Articles from the newspaper *Traian*, 1869–1870], eds. G. Mumjiev and P. Balmuş (Chişinău: ARC, 1998), 257.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 259.

⁴⁰ B. P. Hasdeu, *Publicistică politică (1858–1868)* [Political essays and articles: 1858–1868], ed. Stancu Ilin (Bucharest: Floarea Darurilor, 2002), 70–71.

confronted the various intellectual currents present in the zeitgeist of nineteenth-century Europe. However, the basic framework of his doctrine remained essentially Vicoian and Herderian. In the following passage, for example, Hasdeu attempts to reconcile the contemporary idea of progress with his pre-Romantic and Romantic intellectual sources by stating:

Vico's doctrine is a theory that nobody understood, not even the Italian Con-toni, who, in his book *Giambattista Vico* (1864), calls Vico a "regressive" writer. In fact, nothing could be more progressive than Vico and his theory. For Vico, all mankind is a human-soul, not a human-body, and this human-soul is constantly reborn, becoming more and more perfect . . . every rebirth signals a certain progress and each one of the three ages represents for Vico a concentric circle. . . . Vico's theory is thus progressive and, with regard to universal history, it is the equivalent of Christ's theory about a single human being.⁴¹

The providentialism that is purportedly expressed in human history is an essential element in the overall structure of his writings. Hasdeu's position toward the contemporary intellectual fields of Romanticism, positivism, and evolutionism was underpinned by a characteristic division of the different orders of reality dominated by separate but interconnected principles. The thinker asserted that "a positivism based on history should be materialist, spiritualist, and deist at the same time," since human existence and human progress are only possible through the constant and purposeful action of Providence, which represents an "intentional cause, an intelligent force, an ordering power having as its aim human progress in the future."⁴² Yet, one should not overemphasize Hasdeu's critical attitude toward the concept of progress. The interwar reading of his work (especially Mircea Eliade's interpretation) stressed the instrumentality or the secondary importance of progress for Hasdeu. Eliade thus "accentuates that Hasdeu's vision of progress was not corresponding to the mechanistic vision of the positivist mainstream. For him, human progress was only possible, not necessary, and destiny could not be derived from merely material factors."⁴³ It is true that Hasdeu invoked the role of Providence in shaping human history, but Eliade's perspective is clearly shaped by the messianic and anti-historicist intellectual atmosphere of the 1930s. As Balázs Trencsényi argues, there was a "fundamental difference between the nineteenth-century late Romantic projects of national-identity building and the new nationalism of the interwar period."⁴⁴ One can support the author's conclu-

⁴¹ Pecican, *B. P. Hasdeu istoric*, 52.

⁴² Eliade, *Despre Eminescu și Hasdeu*, 101.

⁴³ Trencsényi, "National Characterology in the Romanian Political Discourses of the Nineteenth Century," 32.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

sion that “Hasdeu’s understanding of the fusion of evolutionism and cultural relativism differed considerably from that of Eliade, who practically rejected the nineteenth-century understanding of progress which Hasdeu did share, even if critically.”⁴⁵ The Romantic stage of nation-building in Romania presupposed a partial formulation of elements of cultural relativism, but even in its more radical variant it preserved the ambiguity between particular and universal principles that essentially derived from Herder’s work.

The assessment of the extent to which positivist and evolutionist currents mingled with Hasdeu’s Romantic and providentialist reading of reality is also hampered by the conflation of positivist and evolutionist tendencies under an essentialist label fundamentally opposed to the Romantic model. Despite his openness to positivist methodology, Hasdeu never renounced his basic Vicoian-Herderian scheme. In a characteristic pronouncement from the mid-1870s, a period which coincided with the most productive phase of his historical writing, the scholar asserted: “We have respected in the past and we will staunchly respect in the future the experimental method, admitting as the sole basis for discussion reality and reality alone; within this reality, however, above things material [*pipăite cu degetul*], a directing omnipresent and trans-experimental force manifests itself, a force that man is not meant to *cognize*, but one that he cannot fail to *recognize*.”⁴⁶ In this sense, the idea of the division of reality into two spheres—the knowable and the unknowable—is borrowed from Herbert Spencer, whose soft variant of positivism Hasdeu preferred to the Comtean version with which he was also familiar.⁴⁷ For Hasdeu, national history would be transformed into a national pedagogy, but strictly within the limits of the sphere of the knowable. Thus, Providence remains beyond human purview, as does history, whose meaning cannot be apprehended by its human subjects.

This distinction between history and destiny is important to bear in mind so as not to read elements of ethnic ontology into Hasdeu’s scheme. The difference between the interwar image of the national essence as fundamentally ahistorical and immutable and Hasdeu’s historicist vision should be kept in mind. Otherwise, even astute commentators could suc-

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Pecican, *B. P. Hasdeu istoric*, 53 (Hasdeu’s emphasis in original). The “force” he is talking about is, of course, divine Providence.

⁴⁷ A detailed analysis of Hasdeu’s encounter with evolutionism and positivism can be found in *ibid.*, 63–82. The most important authors whom Hasdeu cited in his writings and who clearly had a major impact on his worldview are A. Comte, H. Spencer, H. T. Buckle, and, on the evolutionist side, Darwin and Alfred Russell Wallace. See *ibid.*, 70.

cumb to unsubstantiated parallels between Hasdeu's version of Romanian continuity and, for example, Blaga's image of Romanian space.⁴⁸ No less interesting is Hasdeu's connection to the Darwinian model and its transfer to the social realm. The organic development of national and social entities was a given for Hasdeu even during his purely Romantic early period, but it was reinforced later in his career through his readings of Darwin. Before using his satirical acumen to dissect Russian society in a pseudo-Darwinian manner, Hasdeu gave one of the most consistent interpretations using an individual-society parallel to analyze contemporary Romanian society.

In a lecture given in the early 1890s that attempted to diagnose the situation in late nineteenth-century Romania, Hasdeu begins from the premise that "nations have their ages, just as individuals do." He then goes on to assert that "between the individual and the species that he belongs to, between ontogeny and phylogeny, as the naturalists express themselves, there is the closest connection of a parallel development,"⁴⁹ while directly invoking Darwin's example of inferring the "great law of evolution of the human species" from his examination of the human embryo.⁵⁰ Hasdeu's conclusion is more than revealing: "This correlation between the individual and the species is the only true and scientific ground, the only pedestal upon which the philosophy of history can and should be placed. Just as in the case of individual development, every nation, and the whole human species everywhere [pass] through the same evolutionary stages and develop in a similar way."⁵¹ Hasdeu then employs Vico's scheme of "historical ages," which he sees as an "application of Christ's teaching" to society, in order to prove his theory about the "infantile" stage of contemporary Romania, concluding on a solemn note: "Christ, Vico, and Darwin: these three names summarize the science of life [*știința vieții*]."⁵² The evolutionist, cyclical, and deist elements of this scheme of human history are entangled here in a way that not only points to the direction in which Hasdeu's mature thought evolved, but also reveals the remarkable continuity with his earlier opinions. The image of society as an organism thus achieves its full representation in a powerful synthesis. National history played a central role in Hasdeu's classification of the "life sciences" (in the sense of humanities), but he remained too anchored in the nineteenth-century idiom of universal progress to elaborate the concept of specifically Romanian scholarship.

⁴⁸ This is the case with the historian Ovidiu Pecican. See *ibid.*, 229–36.

⁴⁹ B. P. Hasdeu, *Scriseri filosofice* [Philosophical writings], ed. Vasile Vetișanu (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și enciclopedică, 1985), 117.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 118.

As stated above, Bessarabia was not a central building block in Hasdeu's scheme of national history. Pecican has recently deciphered the hierarchy of symbolic geographies in his work. In his opinion, Hasdeu's attention was mainly focused on the regions of Wallachia (especially Oltenia) and the Banat. It is not clear if this thematic and interpretive preference can be linked to the peculiar variant of the continuity theory postulated by Hasdeu (according to which these two regions represented the hearth of the Romanian people) or to more mundane factors, such as his warmer reception in Bucharest or his close relationship with some political figures and intellectuals from these regions.⁵³ In any case, Oltenia and the Banat represented "spaces-matrices" that proved to be fundamental not only for Hasdeu's self-positioning in the spiritual universe that he created, but also for the image of the national body that he conveyed. In this case, one encounters another ambiguity that characterized the protean world of Hasdeu's mind. His rejection of foreign elements—either in the form of external threats and borrowings or in the guise of menacing and insidious "internal aliens"—is generally linked to the formulation of a full-fledged national discourse. The trope of national purity is, of course, not reducible to racist doctrines and is present in most narratives of national essence and rebirth, as is true in Hasdeu's case.

In his earlier pronouncements against the Latinist current in Romanian historiography, especially in the controversial article "Pierit-au dacii?" ("Have the Dacians Perished?"), the young scholar already intimated his later theory of "strata and substrata" and thus recognized the "amalgamated" character of the Romanian ethnic community. Even while constantly urging national elites to fight against the foreign element, Hasdeu occasionally extolled the national virtues of Romanians in regions under foreign influence by shifting the emphasis of his narrative and by presenting non-Romanian communities as catalysts for the development of national consciousness. For example, in a text devoted to the continuity of Romanians in the Banat he states the following:

Of the two original nests of Romanianism, the first one on the Olt and the other one on the Timiș, Oltenia was almost completely spared from any foreign invasion, and still one cannot say that it preserved its nationality better than the Banat, where the Romanian was ceaselessly in contact with various kinds of barbarian peoples. . . . This uninterrupted contact with foreigners made him, on the one hand, more jealous of his own nationality and more conservative out of fear of somehow losing it; but . . . on the other hand, the memory of that contact gradually became crystallized like some kind of layered strata in the speech and legends of the Romanians of Banat, so that only in their midst can one still

⁵³ Pecican, *B. P. Hasdeu istoric*, 126–30.

find certain medieval ethnic traditions that one would search for in vain in Oltenia and, with even less success, in Transylvania.⁵⁴

The power and ethnic vitality of this branch of the Romanian people and the archaism and traditional character of their mores provided a privileged point from which to observe the past in the living mirror of the present. The picture drawn by Hasdeu is multidimensional. First, he invokes, if only obliquely, the rhetoric of the "superiority of the Latin race" (represented by Romanians) over all the other "floating" elements with which it came into contact. The civilizational hierarchy that is so salient in his argument—as evidenced by the opposition between Romanians and barbarians—points to the importance of the idealization of the past in his rhetoric. Second, the archaism and conservatism of the Banat Romanians is valuable primarily as a mechanism for preserving their ethnic purity and the direct access to original sources of the Romanian nation that other parts have supposedly lost. Third, this passage should be interpreted within the context of the hierarchy of ethnic danger for the Romanians that Hasdeu developed. In other words, he created a scheme of comparative otherness that could serve as a litmus test for the interaction of the Romanian (i.e., Latin) element with other nationalities (*giniți*).

This hierarchy presupposed different degrees of affinity between the Latin peoples and the Slavic and Germanic "tribes" that constituted the historical components of European civilization. In Hasdeu's opinion, "the Latins must beware of Slavs, and among all Latin [nations] the Romanians are the most exposed to danger. Especially against this Slavic danger, and particularly against the Muscovite colossus, the Germans are our natural allies."⁵⁵ The Russian Empire thus represented the epitome of otherness in Hasdeu's scheme of Romanian history. Russia was not only a politically antagonistic system embodying the despotic and imperial principles starkly opposed to Hasdeu's "national democratic" program, but it was also an agent of uniformization that threatened the existence of national entities in Eastern Europe.

In Hasdeu's work, Bessarabia is depicted as a corrupted part of the national body immersed in a hostile environment. Contrary to most interpretations of Hasdeu's writings in which Bessarabian topics received minimal coverage, one of his later disciples, Iuliu Dragomirescu, wrote that "Hasdeu's consciousness was always filled with this heart-breaking tragedy of our Romania, and [his heart] was always beating along with its pain and its

⁵⁴ B. P. Hasdeu, *Românii bănățeni din punct de vedere al conservatismului dialectal și teritorial* [The Banat Romanians from the point of view of linguistic and territorial conservatism] (Bucharest: Institutul de Arte Grafice "C. Goebel," 1896), 66.

⁵⁵ Liviu Marian, *B. P. Hasdeu și Rusia* [B. P. Hasdeu and Russia] (Chișinău, 1925), 19.

muffled revolt. He listened to Romania's devastatingly sad song only through the voice of Bessarabia, and nobody understood this song better than he did. The eyes of his Moldavian heart were always drawn toward the northeast, and he seemed to bear throughout his entire life a deep hole or a mortal wound in his soul: Bessarabia."⁵⁶ Accordingly, Dragomirescu dedicated his biographical sketch to the one-hundredth anniversary of Bessarabia's annexation by Russia and emphasized Hasdeu's Bessarabian origin and the formative imprint of his Bessarabian upbringing and milieu upon the intellectual and emotional aspects of his personality.⁵⁷ However, this portrayal is highly subjective and does not reflect Hasdeu's own stated priorities as an intellectual and a public figure. Similarly, the connections Liviu Marian draws between Hasdeu's "hatred" toward Russia and his Romanian nationalism do not reveal much about the uncertain identity that Hasdeu displayed in his early period.

In any case, it seems that his ambiguous legal status following his immigration to the Romanian Principalities⁵⁸ did have an impact on his sense of Romanianness. In fact, Hasdeu's self-perception evolved from a justification of his Romanian citizenship based exclusively on his ethnic origins⁵⁹ toward a more legalistic and pragmatic stance that emphasized his naturalization according to the existing laws and his patriotic academic credentials that made him a useful subject of the Principalities.⁶⁰ It is not clear if there is a direct link between the periodic accusations of Russophilism that his opponents used to discredit him during his stay in Iași and the radical nationalist program that he gradually developed throughout the 1860s.⁶¹ However, his marginal status in Russia and his insecure position in the late 1850s and early 1860s in Iași point to the reactive nationalism of a minor representative of the imperial borderlands who transferred his frustrations to the more favorable context of an emerging nation-state.⁶²

According to the legend Hasdeu himself propagated, he was purportedly sentenced to exile to Siberia because of his desertion and his defiance of the Russian authorities, which he expressed by "ripping up the Musco-

⁵⁶ Iuliu Dragomirescu, *Ideile și faptele lui B. P. Hasdeu: Partea I (1836–1863)* [The ideas and deeds of Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu: Part I (1836–1863)] (Bucharest, 1913), 3.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵⁸ Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu, "Împământenirea" lui Hasdeu [Hasdeu's "naturalization" in Moldavia] (Iași: Tipografia Liga Culturală, 1943), 8.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁶¹ This can be inferred from the connection that the historian Gh. Bezviconi makes between the work of Dumitru C. Moruzi and Hasdeu in his booklet *Romancierul Dimitrie Moruzi* [The novelist Dimitrie Moruzi] (Iași, 1942), 25.

⁶² See Pecican, *B. P. Hasdeu istoric*, 99.

vite passport" upon arriving in Romania. As his later biographers showed, these colorful details were certainly part of Hasdeu's youthful tendency toward Romantic exaggeration and did not reflect the circumstances of his actual emigration to Romania.⁶³ His position as a former subject of the Russian Empire haunted Hasdeu's early years to an extent that was exaggerated by interwar commentators and probably Hasdeu himself, but the Russophobic tendencies in his work should not be ignored. Later in life, Hasdeu retroactively constructed an image of his education in Russia in the following terms: "Born beyond the Prut in Bessarabia, educated in a Muscovite, 'tsardox' atmosphere, which I detested everywhere and always hated: at school, at the university, in cultural circles, I liked none of my teachers."⁶⁴ Accordingly, Hasdeu constructed a self-image that emphasized his autodidactic efforts and only recognized his intellectual debt to his father. His Russian experience, although fundamental for his familiarization with contemporary Romanticism in its literary and historical forms, was a stigma that he constantly sought to transcend.

The fundamental ambiguity of Hasdeu's relationship with the Russian cultural milieu was visible in the reaction to his election as an honorary member of the Russian Academy of Sciences in 1884. In a letter to his family residing in Paris at the time, Hasdeu appreciates this "unexpected honor" mostly due to the fact that he was no longer considered "as a sort of nihilist" and could reclaim his father's assets on Russian soil.⁶⁵ Hasdeu's insistence on such exceptional aspects of his real or imagined biography throughout his life show to what extent the theme of Russian persecution served as a useful tool to assert himself in Romania. However, his ambiguous position as a Bessarabian exile never quite disappeared, even if his successful integration into Romanian cultural life minimized this part of his background.

In a typical gesture of Romantic rebellion, the young Hasdeu presented his emigration to the Romanian Principalities in 1857 as a "flight" and attempted to enter the Iași cultural milieu on his own terms, fabricating a romanticized biography that confused later observers and commentators.⁶⁶ The imprint of the Romantic personality model on Hasdeu's self-construction, which went hand in hand with the elaboration of his nationalist doctrine, was also visible in his oscillation between a national-democratic pro-

⁶³ Ioan Oprișan, *B. P. Hasdeu sau setea de absolut: Tumultul și misterul vieții* [B. P. Hasdeu or the thirst for the absolute: A life's triumph and mystery] (Bucharest: Vestala, 2001), 145.

⁶⁴ Marian, *B. P. Hasdeu și Rusia*, 5.

⁶⁵ Oprișan, *B. P. Hasdeu sau setea de absolut*, 146.

⁶⁶ Among the attempts to disentangle Hasdeu's early intellectual evolution, some of the most important works are those of E. Dvoicenco and I. Oprișan.

gram that dominated his political activity and the aristocratic model that he pursued not only by tracing ethnic Romanian continuity over the centuries, but also by mythologizing the remote origins of his own family.⁶⁷ However, the aristocratic streak in Hasdeu's work derived not only from the need for self-assertion and from the attempt to overcome his initial marginality in Romania, but also from a peculiar concept that distinguished between "true" and "false" elites. Hasdeu's idealization of the peasantry, which perpetuated the nation's essence through folklore and traditional customs, was counterbalanced by a genealogical approach that can be linked to the hero worship model (for which he was indebted to Carlyle) and to the liberal political affiliation that he chose after immigrating to Romania.⁶⁸ Hasdeu's ostensibly democratic preferences were diluted by the Romantic tendency to extol the exceptional figures who embodied the role of divine Providence in history.

The problem of Hasdeu's initial marginality within the Romanian intellectual and historiographical tradition can also be inverted since this tradition itself was somewhat marginal for Hasdeu's professional training. This was true for two reasons. First, his early cultural environment conditioned his better grasp of Russian, Polish, and French historiography in comparison to the nascent tradition of Romanian historical writing represented in the mid-nineteenth century by such figures as Kogălniceanu or Bălcescu.⁶⁹ Second, the impact of the French Romantic historical tradition on the thinking of Romanian Liberals of the 1848 generation and their epigones (including Hasdeu) proved to be much more important for the formation of the Romanian historical canon than any indigenous sources. The interest that Jules Michelet and Edgar Quinet displayed in the history of the Principalities generated feedback in the Romanian milieu—a reaction that has been insufficiently studied, but was far from negligible.⁷⁰ Third, as mentioned above, the Bessarabian context of Hasdeu's early upbringing and his proficiency in the main Slavic languages made him much more sensitive to East-East cultural transfers than most of his Romanian contemporaries. The accusations of Russophilia that periodically surfaced in the 1860s in fact reflected Hasdeu's openness toward non-Romanian, East European scholarly traditions. Such exchanges were most fruitful in the field of Slavic studies where Hasdeu's contacts spanned the whole region. This intellectual openness hardly affected his image of the Russian Empire, which the following discussion will attempt to present.

⁶⁷ Oprea, *B. P. Hasdeu sau setea de absolut*, 9–15.

⁶⁸ For Hasdeu's intellectual debts to Herder's concept of "great ideas" and Carlyle's work, see Pecican, *B. P. Hasdeu istoric*, 39.

⁶⁹ See *ibid.*, 11.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

Hasdeu's full-fledged criticism of Russian society in his two short pieces mentioned above (*The Kreutzer Sonata* and *The Neva Pope*) is centered on two distinct but interconnected themes. In the first case, his argument represents a satirical inversion of the evolutionary scheme of human society that he came to reject later in his life. The rhetorical tropes stressing the animalistic nature of Russian society and its utter foreignness are instances when Hasdeu transcends the political realm in order to emphasize the existential danger that the Russian Empire posed to the West in general and for Romanians (as representatives of the Latin “tribe”) in particular.⁷¹ By turning the Darwinist scheme upside down and using an ostensibly scholarly framework in an otherwise ironic and occasionally grotesque, satirical piece, Hasdeu merges his national militancy with pseudo-academic considerations in a powerful, albeit exaggerated, vision of ontological difference.

In his second piece, he attacks the main point of similarity between Romanians and Russians: their shared Orthodox faith. His argument becomes more narrowly political and reveals his perception of internal and external aliens. Thus, he states:

I have never confronted the Slavic element everywhere; on the contrary, I have always displayed a special sympathy, in particular, for the Bulgarians and the Serbs; but I always fought, and I will always fight, against the Muscovites. Likewise, I am not against the Semitic element everywhere. The Arabs are Semites, and still I have constantly praised them; but I will always fight against the Jews. I will not spare the Jews and the Muscovites even on my deathbed since they are the most dangerous elements for the Romanians and for any other nationality. The first ones are [agents of] denationalization; the others [are agents of] cosmopolitanism; they, the Muscovites and the Jews, are essentially the same thing.⁷²

This distinction between positive and negative varieties of the same “tribe” and, more importantly, the equation of Russians with Jews proves to what extent Hasdeu remained faithful to his radical ethnic nationalism despite his vacillations on a number of topics throughout his career. Aside from the obvious points of his essay—including the unmasking of Russia's pan-Slavic machinations and the attempt to articulate his own image of a Balkan confederation without and against Russia⁷³—his main goal is to delegitimize one of the pillars of Russian imperial discourse: the rhetoric of the Orthodox mission in the Balkans. In this sense, Hasdeu's stance can be

⁷¹ B. P. Hasdeu, *Scrieri* [Selected writings], vol. 2 (Chişinău: Ştiinţa, 1997), 492–503.

⁷² B. P. Hasdeu, *Publicistică politică (1858–1868)*, 81–82.

⁷³ Trencsényi, “National Characterology in the Romanian Political Discourses of the Nineteenth Century,” 28; see Hasdeu, *Publicistică politică (1858–1868)*, 84.

defined as an “anti-discourse” aimed explicitly at undermining the legitimacy of the Russian monarchy. Hasdeu thus asserts: “And then, if one comes to the issue of Orthodoxy, let the Muscovites pretend, at best, that they are some kind of Christians; but they certainly are not Orthodox since they follow a completely different faith that could be called ‘*tsardoxo*,’ with a Neva Pope at its head.”⁷⁴ Hasdeu then denies the existence of any connections between the early Romanian Church and the Muscovite state and ecclesiastical hierarchy: “Until the last [eighteenth] century, we Romanians were not even [direct] neighbors with the Muscovites, but only with the Ruthenians. . . . So, one should not mix the Muscovite masters with the enslaved Ruthenians; the Ruthenians, just like the Poles, are only victims of the barbarous Muscovite.”⁷⁵ Hasdeu’s “Ukrainophile” position was probably influenced by his attitude toward the “Polish question” and by his familiarity with contemporary Polish literature.

Hasdeu then provides an account of Russian sectarianism to show the bankruptcy and falsity of the Russian Orthodox Church. His conclusion is quite revealing: “If one could eliminate the wild fanaticism of these sectarians, they would be the most honorable [group] among the Muscovites: they are honest, they keep their word, they stay away from lies; so that if during the last Russian-Turkish War [of 1877–78] an Old Believer [*lipovan*] had been at the helm of the Russian state, it is certain that [Russia] would not have stolen from us that little piece of Bessarabia after it had promised to preserve the integrity of Romanian territory.”⁷⁶ Along with the elements of national characterology present in this passage, the author’s implicit message points to the corrupted and heretical character of even the most honorable part of the Russian populace. Another trope Hasdeu uses to emphasize Russia’s otherness is the “Russian knout,” which the author connects ingeniously to the heretical nature of the Russian Church. Hasdeu equates the Russian “*tsardoxo*” with unbridled despotism throughout the Russian realm, which makes the “*tsar-pope*” even more reprehensible than his Roman counterpart: “In 1702 [actually in 1721] Peter the Great abolished the Moscow Patriarchate and proclaimed himself supreme chief of the Church. Starting from that date and until today, the tsar is the Neva Pope, just as in the Catholic Church there is the Pope of the Vatican. [But] the Muscovite pope is incomparably more terrible because instead of a staff, he holds in his hand a *nagaika*, a special knout of the Cossacks. This is a Caesarodoxy, a *tsardoxo*, a ‘*nagaikodoxo*,’ but this cannot be Orthodoxy.”⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Hasdeu, *Publicistică politică* (1858–1868), 84.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

Hasdeu's insistence on the religious differences between Romanians and Russians cannot be explained by any special preoccupation with religious issues. Aside from the spiritistic beliefs that dominated the latter part of his life, Hasdeu was reluctant to assign any importance to religion in his scheme of world history or in his public pronouncements. In fact, his skeptical attitude toward religion became a liability for his interwar followers who attempted to appropriate his work for their integral nationalist doctrine. In a recent discussion of Hasdeu's version of Romantic nationalism and its later reception by Mircea Eliade in 1937, one scholar emphasized that “Eliade is . . . surprisingly restrained when discussing the place of religion in Hasdeu's system. As a matter of fact, Hasdeu was a supporter of secularization, and he was even greeting the ‘League of Freethinkers,’ stressing that public instruction and morality should be independent of ‘any mingling of religion’ and going so far as linking conceptually the Church with some other ‘public enemies.’”⁷⁸ Clearly, for Hasdeu, the invocation of Russia's religious otherness was purely instrumental and was applied only in order to strengthen his otherwise political argument.

Hasdeu rejected the purported religious equivalence of the Romanians and “the Muscovites” because of the centrality of this discursive device for Russia. His conclusion is thus a logical corollary of this construction of otherness. Hasdeu proclaims that “the Muscovites are not of the same religion as the Romanians, the Greeks, the Serbians, and the Bulgarians. Only a small step further, a simple variation, and the [Ottoman] sultan could abolish the Patriarchate of Constantinople, proclaiming himself supreme chief of the Christian Church.”⁷⁹ The implicit equivalence of the Russian and Ottoman polities is not only a hyperbolic rhetorical device. Hasdeu views Orthodoxy as an exclusively national religion of the Balkan peoples, and its subordination to the imperial interests and designs of neighboring multinational states is a potential threat to the national principle in Eastern Europe, as with universalistic Roman Catholicism in the West. Moreover, the equation of the Russian and Ottoman empires allows Hasdeu to depict both polities as anti-models or aberrations in the modern world of nations.

In conclusion, Hasdeu's ethnicist reworking of the emerging Romanian national narrative required a complicated reconstruction of identity, both at the community and the personal level. In the first case, while heavily indebted to Western and Eastern European (mainly Russian) intellectual traditions, he proposed a coherent scheme of incremental otherness that distinguished between national “spaces-matrices” and alien environments

⁷⁸ Trencsényi, “National Characterology in the Romanian Political Discourses of the Nineteenth Century,” 32

⁷⁹ Hasdeu, *Publicistică Politică* (1858–1868), 89.

that were inimical to the national principle either through the propaganda of cosmopolitanism or through denationalizing practices. Bessarabia's position in this scheme was ambiguous since it was clearly a part of the national organism, but was at the same time greatly impaired due to its belonging to Russia, and thus part of the otherness that Hasdeu so feared and resented. At a personal level, self-construction went hand in hand with the construction of the nation, so Hasdeu could relate his own experience as a refugee to the experiences of the "enslaved" Romanians of Bessarabia. His Romantic personality as well as the impact of his family education and his readings during his Russian period must be taken into account when analyzing his radical, national-democratic agenda and his political and scholarly views. His marginal status in the Russian Empire provided much of the initial impetus for the articulation of his opinions in the Principalities. The intertwinement of personal and cultural themes in Hasdeu's work makes the in-depth study of his biography both necessary and fascinating.

Moruzi—The Uprooted Traditionalist

The case of Dimitrie C. Moruzi is different in most respects from that of Hasdeu. His marginality is clear not only from the poor reception of his works in contemporary intellectual circles, but also from his unsuccessful bureaucratic career in Romania. This combination of personal, professional, and social frustrations resulted in a peculiar mix of memoirs, social monographs, and political criticism along conservative-traditionalist lines that Moruzi infused into his major works on Russian and Bessarabian subjects. The somewhat discordant note he introduced into the national narrative was sufficiently suitable for mainstream nationalist thought that Nicolae Iorga praised the message and style of Moruzi's writings on several important occasions.⁸⁰ Iorga, moreover, served as an academic mentor who promoted Moruzi's irredentist stance and added a dose of scholarly objectivity to a journalistic and polemical work riddled with clichés and rhetoric designed to impress the reading public. Though he wrote in the early twentieth century—indeed, all of his works appeared later in his life between 1905 and 1914—most literary critics who have studied his publications agree that Moruzi belonged to the Romantic period of the 1848 generation and that his understanding of nationalism was much closer to the optimis-

⁸⁰ First, in his volume on the *Romanian Nation in Bessarabia* (*Neamul Românesc în Basarabia*) published in 1905, followed by the preface Iorga wrote for a collection of Moruzi's articles united in a single volume in 1906. Iorga made a final statement about Moruzi's importance as a nationalist writer in the funeral oration he wrote after the latter's death in 1914.

tic and activist position of modern Romania's "founding fathers" than to the critical and somber stance that characterized the Junimist group and Eminescu's journalism.⁸¹

The following discussion will challenge this view by focusing on the specifically political message of Moruzi's nationalism. Far from endorsing the liberal and progressive vision of his predecessors, Moruzi's argument should instead be seen as a conservative (even regressive) criticism of modern society underpinned by a hostile attitude to social change and a vision of social harmony based on national solidarity. Iorga's interest in Moruzi was thus based on ideological affinity as much as personal sympathy. The idealization of traditional mores and the peasantry as the "foundation of the nation" (*temelia neamului*), the rejection of any foreign influence, and the promotion of a national revival through culture and the people's enlightenment were common themes that Iorga detected in Moruzi's work, despite their generational differences.

Politically, Moruzi subscribed to a militant and irredentist nationalism that saw the division of empires along national lines as necessary and inevitable. The Russian Empire was not only anachronistic, but also fundamentally illegitimate because of its heterogeneity and apparent uniformity that in fact obscured fundamental internal divisions expressed through endemic national hatreds. Moruzi also vilified the Russian imperial system by using a radical and crude version of the theme of Oriental despotism, which supposedly served as the sole binding force for this artificial conglomerate. The most important, novel element that Moruzi introduced in his account was the extensive use of national character as an analytical framework for his pseudo-social approach to Russia. His highly simplistic and essentialist vision of the Russian Empire is interesting mainly as an illustration of the opposition between Russia and European civilization that underpinned his whole argument.

A homogeneous culture and nation represented the sole criteria for the viability of a political entity. The Russian Empire lacked both and thus fundamentally differed in its "social bases" from all other political entities.⁸² In one of his most characteristic passages defining the nature and tendencies of Russian educated society, Moruzi illustrates the persistence of the expansionist drive—changing its form according to the shifting political fortunes of dominant ideologies—through the equation of autocracy, pan-Slavism, and socialism (in its Russian "nihilist" guise) as manifestations of the same "atavistic" impulse of the Russian monarchy to "overwhelm" not only the territories of its neighbors, but also the principles of

⁸¹ One such opinion is cited in the biographical sketch by G. Bezviconi, which remains the most complete account of the writer's career. See Bezviconi, *Romancierul Dimitrie Moruzi*, 24.

⁸² Moruzi, *Rușii și românii*, 6.

“true justice, complete freedom, and human fraternity.”⁸³ In his writings, Moruzi attempts to justify his irredentist agenda by repeatedly employing the authorial justification of objectivity and lack of bias, while pursuing a highly subjective and personal reading of the “Russian colossus.”⁸⁴ This brief sketch points to the duality of his social and political messages that in fact privileged the national principle as superior to social divisions.

Before discussing these aspects in more detail, a brief biographical sketch is needed to clarify the role of Moruzi’s marginality in his discourse and career. Born on July 2, 1850, into one of the most prominent Romanian aristocratic families of Phanariot descent (related to the Sturdza family on his mother’s side), the young Moruzi spent his childhood on one of the Bessarabian estates of his father, Prince Constantin Moruzi. Educated in France from 1863 to 1869, the young aristocrat (now a Russian citizen) became an ardent Francophile and most likely developed a number of his anti-Russian and pro-Polish positions that dominated his later works from his Parisian milieu. The importance of the Polish tradition of aristocratic resistance proved fundamental for the picture of the Bessarabian nobility he later developed in his articles and novels. The Polish example served both as a model and an injunction to his fellow members of the noble estate that he put forward as the quintessential case of avoiding alienation and serving the national cause. After returning to Bessarabia, he briefly served in a variety of local *zemstvos* and noble district assemblies before being attached to the Russian High Command in Romania during the Russian-Ottoman war of 1877–78. The beginning of a service career in the Russian bureaucracy was cut short by a series of professional and personal mishaps that forced him to immigrate to Romania in 1880, thus severing his ties with his family. Thereafter, from 1882 until 1895, he held several minor jobs in Romania’s administration in Dobrogea, but was ultimately dismissed as a result of faction politics within the Liberal Party.

Subsequently, his material situation deteriorated, forcing him to resort to writing since all other sources of revenue were closed off. This period spanning the last ten years of his life witnessed the publication of several novels and shorter literary pieces, as well as occasional collaborations in a number of periodicals. Besides Iorga, Moruzi’s political beliefs were close to another important figure of early twentieth-century Romanian nationalism, A. C. Cuza, but Moruzi never rose above his marginal position as a relatively obscure writer preoccupied with subjects such as alienation and displacement in a foreign environment and praising the vitality and endurance of traditional national virtues.⁸⁵ Moruzi died in Iași in October 1914

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 6, 69.

⁸⁵ Aside from the brochure entitled *Russians and Romanians* that contains Moruzi’s most articulated vision of the “self” and the “other,” other significant sources for

while pursuing his interest in the topic of alienation and contributing his share to the contemporary debate on the “Jewish question” in two less interesting works published the same year.⁸⁶

Moruzi’s work discussing *Russians and Romanians* consists of two unequal but closely related parts. The first and most extensive section is a passionate plea for the nationalization of Russian imperial space and an attack against the Russian political and social fabric based on several premises. The most important factor explaining the resilience, but also the contemporary irrelevance of the Russian imperial state is the Oriental despotism that the author identifies as the cornerstone of the social organization of the Russian Empire. At the outset of his analysis, Moruzi proclaims that “when the founder of the current dynasty was asked by the Muscovite people to accept Muscovy’s crown, he rejected this honor twice; the third time, however, the people kneeled before him and said the following: ‘May Thou be our Tsar; may our lives and property be your own; where you go, we will follow; your word and will shall become the law for us.’ This is, then, the foundation upon which this huge empire was built.”⁸⁷ The theme of the abdication of the “original rights to life . . . and property”⁸⁸ by the Russian populace becomes almost an obsession for Moruzi. This autocratic and despotic principle is visually expressed through the general presence of the “zertzal” (i.e., *zertsalo*),⁸⁹ which carries the inscription of the aforementioned oath and embodies the exercise of monarchical authority.

the dynamics of his discourse are his novels: Dumitru C. Moruzi, *Înstrăinații: Studiu social, în formă de roman (1854–1907)* [The alienated: A social study in the form of a novel] (Vălenii de Munte: Editura “Neamul Românesc,” 1910), original edition in 1907; and Dumitru C. Moruzi, *Pribegi în țară răpită: Roman social Basarabean* [Refugees in a stolen country: A Bessarabian social novel] (Iași: Institutul de Arte Grafice N. V. Ștefăniu et Co., 1912). Also significant for Moruzi’s infatuation with the “national tradition” and his “rural utopia,” as well as his idyllic “nostalgia” for a “lost Bessarabian [personal] paradise,” is the collection of (pseudo) popular songs he published on the occasion of the 1912 anniversary: Dumitru C. Moruzi, *Cântece basarabene* [Bessarabian songs] (Iași: Institutul de Arte Grafice N. V. Ștefăniu et Co., 1912).

⁸⁶ Details of Moruzi’s biography, as well as a short, comprehensive bibliography of his works and the meager critical assessments of his writings (mostly from a literary perspective), can be found in the apologetic preface written for the recent Chișinău edition of his political articles: Iurie Colesnic, “Reîntoarcerea pribeagului” [The return of the refugee], in Moruzi, *Rușii și românii*, III–XIX.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸⁹ The *zertsalo* was a trilateral prism featuring the imperial eagle and the three most important decrees issued by Peter I in the early 1720s. It was on public display in all Russian state institutions throughout the whole empire.

This invocation of Oriental despotism was reinforced by its transfer from the political to the wider social realm. Russian society was thus radically different from everything known to human history before—a fact curiously neglected, in Moruzi's opinion, by most foreign observers who "regarded Russia through the prism of Western ideas and, when judging things Russian, employed the criteria of their native countries when they should have pondered the words carved on the zertzal."⁹⁰ Unsurprisingly, the lack of political and social autonomy went hand in hand with the uniformity and monotony of Russian space itself, shaped by the same super-human will of Russian monarchs. The contradictory image of an empire's might and simultaneous weakness is at its height in the following passage:

Everywhere the same buildings, monumental and dreary in their uniformity; on the streets, in the railway stations, on the roads, [one can see] the same bearded and morose faces, the same caps and broad waistcoats, as broad as everything that surrounds you; the same broad Russian life, *russkaia shirokaia zhizn'*, as they say, that starts with the excessive breadth of the streets and of the railways. . . . One can feel that a single and unhindered will combined everything from ancient times in order to show the greatness of the empire and to give, through uniformity, the illusion of unity.⁹¹

This reading of Russia à la Custine is characteristic of Moruzi's anti-imperial agenda, and it also points to the superficiality of the imperial structure since ultimately it is nothing but a "veil" concealing reality. The fundamental difference is in the message that Moruzi tries to convey. He welcomes the advent of mass politics, but the only form that is conceivable and desirable is the national one. His ostensibly social analysis is in fact primarily political because its aim is to discern what future political project could replace the decaying and dissipating tsarist illusion. The author makes this goal explicit by stating that "once [the readers] ascertain the spiritual state of every separate [social] stratum, it will be easy for them to decide: whether *tsarism* today can still rest upon the words carved on the zertzal; whether a *constitution* is possible for this flood of peoples; or whether *federalism*, with different laws and constitutions, could hold them together in one piece."⁹² For Moruzi, the answer to all these questions is obviously negative since neither autocracy nor parliamentary government (or federalism) can have any intrinsic value unless they reflect the independent existence of national entities.

According to Moruzi, the difference between national characters precludes any constitutionalist project or revolutionary design to restore the

⁹⁰ Ibid., 7.

⁹¹ Ibid., 7–8.

⁹² Ibid., 12.

Russian state on a new basis. This state is itself the creation of autocracy and should disappear at the same time as tsarism.⁹³ Moreover, popular sovereignty is only possible within a homogeneous national state and is unthinkable under Russian conditions: "France substituted the will of the people to the king's will because there was a king and there was a people. What could Russia replace the will of the tsar with?"⁹⁴ Accordingly, Moruzi rebels against the notion of the "Russian people," which he sees as a "conventional lie" and an "illusion." The subjugated masses appear immersed in a "doublethink" scheme, secretly harboring national desires while openly proclaiming their allegiance to the monarchy.⁹⁵ In a circular argument, the salience of nationality is purportedly confirmed by the failure of Russification, which "only had an influence upon the newly built cities and the newest parts of old towns," whereas the "Russian people" consist of "the Muscovites [Great Russians], the aristocracy of the subdued countries, officials in service or in retirement coming from all over [the empire] and settled, along with their offspring, in all provinces, merchants, artisans, gathered in the same way as the officials and with the same feelings and hidden respect for their origins."⁹⁶ The "Russian people" thus appear in Moruzi's formulation as an artificial conglomerate lacking any truly national characteristics.

Moreover, the Great Russians themselves, though originally part of the Slavic "tribe" that Moruzi endows with incipient democratic institutions, were corrupted by the Mongol invasion that altered their national character and caused them to exchange their supposedly ancient "social contract" for the unbridled despotism of Muscovite princes. This Mongol legacy was a stigma that tainted the whole Russian imperial tradition and that Peter the Great's reforms did nothing to surpass, only consolidating the old system inaugurated by his Mongol predecessors.⁹⁷ Though Moruzi's argument is certainly typical of Western Russophobic circles and is out of tune with more benign, contemporary perceptions of Russia, he presents one of the most extensive Romanian reflections on the topic.

The theme of Oriental despotism is supplemented by the related motifs of civilizational hierarchy and cultural inferiority that delegitimize the claims of Great Russians to rule over their empire. This cultural difference is all the more abhorrent to the author since Great Russians are not only culturally inferior to the homogeneous nations of Western Europe, but also to most of the ethnic groups inhabiting the empire's Western Borderlands. In a later work, Moruzi even identifies a "great historical truth, an ethno-

⁹³ Moruzi, *Rușii și românii*, 11.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 10–11.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 44–47.

logical principle well-proven and recognized as elementary by the entirety of civilized humanity: *a nation [neam] older in enlightenment and civilization can never melt or lose itself within a barbarian nation, even when, due to certain circumstances, the former might lose those [progressive] features, preserving only its language.*⁹⁸ This passage is important as an illustration of Moruzi's adherence to a radical version of anti-Russian discourse, and it also points to the primacy of linguistic criteria in the author's classification of national features.

The theme of cultural difference is important for his argumentative strategy both as an absolute criterion of comparative national psychology and as a distinctly political shortcoming that invalidates any attempt to internally restructure the Russian Empire. Moruzi camouflages his conservative political views under a cloak of pragmatism that instrumentalizes cultural difference in political terms: "If more cultured and ancient civilized peoples, like the Poles, the Germans, etc., have until now surrendered to certain customs resting upon the right of the strongest and divine sanction, will they bow before a people that is much more inferior to them from these two points of view and that, reborn to life in the name of liberty and human rights, will no longer be able to invoke either divine right or the right of the strongest?"⁹⁹ Revolutionary upheaval and federalist schemes are thus as illusory a solution as anachronistic autocracy since they ignore the primacy of nationality as the sole basis for collective identification and autonomy.

Moruzi's subjective and polemical examination of Russian imperial society follows a double path. On the one hand, he reviews the vertical social structure of the empire, following the estate classification and tirelessly emphasizing the hidden but deep national divisions that undermine it from within. On the other hand, most of his polemical energy is devoted to a horizontal analysis of the major ethnic groups (including Great Russians) from the western part of the Romanov Empire.¹⁰⁰ In the case of the Jews, the author's fundamentally anti-Semitic position is somewhat qualified by a pro-Zionist stance¹⁰¹ and, rather unexpectedly, by a parallel between the ethnic character of Jews and Romanians: "One can thus see that the Jew's ethnic character is at least as constant and as inflexible as that of the Romanian; thus, his faith, though opposed to ours, has not been a less staunch shield of his ethnicity [*neam*] than Orthodoxy has been for us."¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Moruzi, *Pribezi în țară răpită*, 405. Author's emphasis.

⁹⁹ Moruzi, *Rușii și românii*, 107.

¹⁰⁰ Thus, he dedicates special chapters to the "national characteristics" of the Jews (*Rușii și românii*, 27–36), Poles (37–40), Great Russians (41–52), and Ruthenians (Little Russians) (53–58).

¹⁰¹ Moruzi, *Rușii și românii*, 30.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 28.

Moruzi is much more vehement in his condemnation of the “Jewish element” as an agent of cosmopolitanism and modernity. While traditional Jewish mores are perceived as natural, the rejection of traditional values, the tendency to assimilate, and especially the association with revolutionary circles are depicted as “truly dangerous.”¹⁰³

Moruzi’s anti-Semitism thus represents a transitional stage from the premodern phase of religious difference to its nationalist appropriation, though his drift in this direction is moderated by the emphasis on the common task of national liberation confronting all national entities of the Russian Empire. However, one should not downplay Moruzi’s anti-Semitism. Writing in the early 1940s, one of the few exegetes of Moruzi’s work did not hesitate to trace the “incontestable impact” that the rabidly anti-Jewish sketches of Pavel Krushevan had on Moruzi’s image of the “Jewish element.”¹⁰⁴ In this context, one should mention that the influence of Russian anti-Semitic discourse on its Romanian variant was not accidental. An even more interesting example is Iorga’s ambivalent position toward the same Krushevan. Iorga’s hesitation between praising Krushevan’s anti-Semitism and condemning his Russian nationalism was bitterly denounced by Constantin Stere in a series of polemical articles during 1905 and 1906.

Moruzi’s position regarding the “Polish question” was much more straightforward. Moruzi was clearly an ardent Polonophile, which is hardly surprising given his upbringing in the pro-Polish atmosphere of Paris during the 1860s. His positive attitude toward the role of the Polish aristocracy as the awakener of the nation and (in a messianic vein) as a group expiating its sin of political anarchy and irresponsibility transformed it into a model that its Bessarabian counterpart conspicuously failed to emulate. In Moruzi’s own words, “one can say, in all truth, that among the whole heterogeneous, heterodox, and even heteroglossic aristocracy which surrounded the tsar, a sole [group] remained constant in its faith and true to its own nation: this is the high Polish aristocracy!”¹⁰⁵ An even more exalted vision accompanies Moruzi’s presentation of the history of the Polish people, who for him represent the epitome of national consciousness and fidelity to tradition. Moreover, Poles are an element of resistance to the revolutionary designs of cosmopolitan intellectuals and agitators who endanger Moruzi’s ideal of national harmony based on an organic model of social solidarity. Thus, he states: “Oh, you, future citizens of the world, you, who abolish borders, tongues, and peoples, try, if you feel numerous and strong enough, to instill your irresponsible ideas into nine million creatures [the

¹⁰³ Ibid., 35.

¹⁰⁴ Bezviconi, *Romancierul Dimitrie Moruzi*, 28.

¹⁰⁵ Moruzi, *Rușii și românii*, 16.

Poles] that you see as benighted, when in fact they have as their bulwark a faith older, higher, and more humane than your own: the love of hearth, of their native tongue, and of their nation."¹⁰⁶

In a scheme of dualistic symbolic opposition, Poles are the positive figures on a stage of national characters whose antagonists are Great Russians, beset with their "barbarian" past and enslaved by the will of their monarch. To enhance the impact of his impressionistic argument, Moruzi resorts to the simplifying and didactic method of national personification, introducing emblematic figures or ideal types that embody the national essence. Perhaps the most poignant sketch of a collective national person is the presentation of Great Russians in the form of a generic peasant plagued by a number of moral vices (greed, thievery, lack of restraint, a talent for dissimulation, xenophobia, etc.).¹⁰⁷ The rhetorical effect is even more powerful if one compares this image with the picture of the Ruthenian peasant, who originated from "a mix of people . . . some of them born free and others escaping from slavery."¹⁰⁸ The extent to which Moruzi internalized the topos of the "Muscovite slave mentality" is amply confirmed by the idealized representation of Ruthenians/Ukrainians, who are more distant from their Great Russian counterparts by virtue of their "thirst for freedom" that is a defining element in the author's inventory of national qualities, along with fidelity to tradition and the preservation of native language. Ruthenians are especially important for Moruzi's narrative due to their intermediate position between the Romanians of Bessarabia and the Russian center. In fact, this is one of the rare instances in which Romanian authors seem aware of the importance of the Ukrainian national element as a potentially disrupting force for the unity of the Russian Empire. However, Moruzi's Ukrainophile position was filtered through his familiarity with the Polish interpretation of the "Ukrainian question." Thus, Poles and Ukrainians appear as allied components in the barrier against Russian domination: "In the future and inevitable dismemberment of the great tsarist empire, I see, between the Great Russians and the Bessarabians, between Chişinău and Moscow, at least one big state, if not two states, that will emerge: Poland and Ruthenia, Warsaw and Kiev, either separated or united."¹⁰⁹

Moruzi also draws on the similarities between the everyday customs of Ruthenians and the Romanians of Bessarabia, emphasizing their difference from Russians at the empire's center. Whereas Great Russians appear as

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 40.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 50–52 (chapter ten, "Nikita Ivanovici").

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 54.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 109. The only analogy can be found in Constantin Stere's discourse during World War I. Curiously, Iorga totally ignored the Ukrainian factor in his pronouncements on the Russian Empire.

the quintessential "imperial nation," Ruthenians represent the most anarchic, but also the most authentic part of the "Slavic triad," lacking both the tradition of social oppression (contrary to the Poles) and political oppression (contrary to the Russians). Hence, the need to maintain cordial relations between Ruthenians and Romanians (both authentic and pure peasant nations despite their precarious position as objects of foreign expansion) appears natural: "I only strove to put in front of the reader those three nations of the Slavic tribe [*seminții*] in order to prove that between the Dniester and Moscow, between the Dniester and Warsaw dwells the Ruthenian people, our true neighbor, with whom we have the same need to live in good faith as it does to have friendly relations with us."¹¹⁰ The ethnic hierarchy of the Russian Empire's Western Borderlands thus emerges in a distorted form given Moruzi's predilection for the peasant element as the embodiment of national virtues and his belief in a peculiar, ethnicized form of national democracy based on conservative principles and respect for an almost immutable national tradition.

Moruzi's stance on Bessarabia, which he develops in the second section of his work, is resolutely irredentist and contains prophetic passages proclaiming the advent of the "world of nations." In a characteristic example of rhetorical inversion, he claims to harbor no such thought when in fact integrating Bessarabia into the national body: "I have no intention to promote any kind of irredentism in regard to the Bessarabian question, or [to argue for] an arrogant behavior toward the Russian government in the moments of extreme difficulty it is passing through [the 1905 Revolution]. . . . I have always had respect for the dead and the fatally ill. We do not need irredenta in our own home."¹¹¹ The picture of the Bessarabian populace is constructed along the lines of the traditionalist discourse sketched above, according to which the Bessarabian peasantry represents the foundation of the nation and the most solid guarantee for the persistence of Romanian identity in Bessarabia. In this scheme, the Moldavian peasant of Bessarabia inhabits a world of ahistorical and patriarchal tradition. The much-vaunted ethnic resistance turns out to be historical immobility preserving the rural population in its pristine state prior to the Russian annexation: "The force of ethnic resistance of the Romanian element from Bessarabian villages is unimaginable! No matter what has been done, no matter what strategies have been used to denationalize him, everything was fruitless. The peasant of 1905 is still the peasant of 1812. He passed, unmoved, through good and evil [times], through the temptations of interest and through the disasters of the knout, without losing either his language or his customs."¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 70.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 109.

¹¹² Ibid., 90.

Moruzi's indebtedness to Iorga's view of traditional peasant society is obvious in such passages. However, he did not harbor any sympathy for reformist or revolutionary change that was the ultimate goal of populist ideologues such as Z. Arbore-Rally and C. Stere in Romania. On the contrary, Moruzi identified with the conservative "samanatorist"¹¹³ current of Iorga and his followers who maintained that peasants are, by definition, inert and patriarchal since they appear as bearers of primordial nationality rather than active agents of history. The shocks of history thus hardly affect this group that embodies the collective memory of the national community. In an authorial introduction to one of his novels (a strategy he routinely used in his works), Moruzi makes this explicit by invoking "a figure greatest of all, greater than . . . Cuza, that for innumerable centuries persists, unmoved and constant in its faith, language and customs, letting, with the same indifference, all the invasions, migrations, and the thoughtless inventions and phrases of another sort of 'alienated' people . . . pass over it."¹¹⁴ The same theme of resistance through the ignorance of history and persistence of ancient traditions appears in the conclusion of a later novel specifically devoted to the mechanism of alienation in the Bessarabian context.¹¹⁵ The consistency with which Moruzi returns to this theme points to one of the fundamental contradictions of his position: while his narrative is rooted in history, the national essence manifests itself in forms of everyday life only tangentially related to actual historical events and constitutes a genetic cultural code resistant to external change. The mass mobilization of the peasantry in the name of national values should thus rest on a regressive social order based on an idyllic vision of rural social harmony.

This abstract ethnic resistance is detailed through a narrative of the Russian authorities' strategies aimed at Russifying the local population, a campaign thwarted by the vitality of traditional social structures. Moruzi praises the peasantry's reluctance to engage in the modern state apparatus—manifested in the intrusion of the local administration, the army, the Church, and the school system—as a fundamental asset for Romanian irredentism. His conclusion reinforces this point as follows: "Thus, neither through [mixed] marriages, nor through colonization, the Church, the schools, or through material interests and the creation of new interests in local politics [the *zemstvos*] could [the Russians] achieve denationalizing the Bessarabian peasant. The foundation of the nation remained unspoiled: the language, the clothing, the mores, the customs remain unchanged, and

¹¹³ This label derived from the periodical *Sămănătorul* (The Sower) published by Iorga in the early twentieth century, which promoted his national-conservative vision of Romanian development.

¹¹⁴ Moruzi, *Înstrăinații*, 6.

¹¹⁵ Moruzi, *Pribegi în țară răpită*, 405.

even the general appearance of the villages is the same as within [Romanian] Moldova."¹¹⁶

Despite these favorable conditions, the Romanian irredentist project suffered from a fundamental shortcoming: the "Chinese wall" of ignorance and mutual prejudices that Moruzi attempted to deconstruct. Moruzi clearly understood Bessarabia's marginality within Romanian national discourse and emphasized that "it is a fact that at present the majority of our intellectual elites know in greater detail the life and customs of the Boers and the Japanese than those of the Bessarabian Romanians."¹¹⁷ Bessarabia was absent not only from the political and academic activities of Romanian intellectuals, but also from the artistic depictions of the ideal fatherland that were central to the invention of the national canon: "This unbounded treasure of poetry and of inspiration for the [national] art is sleeping, buried in the Romanian's indifference, waiting for a Pushkin or a Lermontov to uncover it and to sing it in Russian! Our poets limit their songs only to [the space] from the Tissa to the sea! They want to hear nothing about the Dniester that washes the true borders of our ancient domain, or they lose their voice for fear of the Cosacks."¹¹⁸ The ideal boundaries of Romanian national space called for a realignment according to the shifting priorities of national discourse. As in the case of other Bessarabian émigrés in Romania, Moruzi waged a losing campaign not only against Russian discourse, but also against the region's internal marginality within Romanian national space.

The rhetorical arsenal that he used to counter Bessarabia's peripheral status presupposed, above all, the fusion of the argument "from ethnicity" with the argument "from history." According to Moruzi, Bessarabia's special importance for Romania resided in its historical link to the Kingdom that should have propelled the "Bessarabian question" to the forefront of the national agenda and made Bessarabia qualitatively different from the other Romanian-inhabited territories. Thus, he argues:

The Romanians from the Pind [in Macedonia] are our brothers by blood, origin, and language, but never has the Pind been a Romanian land; the Transylvanians are even closer to us. . . . I have always admired these more industrious and persistent brothers of ours, but even Transylvania has not been united with us save for a short and insignificant period. Bessarabia, however, has been ours since the foundation of the state; it shared our glories and our sufferings; it had the same language, history, and faith as we did. Are some ninety years, not even a whole century, sufficient for it to become more estranged and less known to us than Japan?¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Moruzi, *Ruși și români*, 94.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

One of the most interesting aspects of Moruzi's account is related to the inverted mirror of mutual prejudices that he lists as the main impediments to Bessarabia's complete integration into the ideal fatherland on par with other targets of Romanian irredentism. For their part, Bessarabians perceived the Romanians of the Kingdom as "Moldavians, mixed with Hungarians and Bulgarians, who speak a corrupted language" and have a king of "foreign faith."¹²⁰ This popular mentality, Moruzi asserts, was complemented by the misperceptions of educated circles who viewed Romanian society as immoral. Moruzi also refers negatively to the linguistic barrier resulting from the heavy infusion of neologisms into standard Romanian—hence the widening lag between the Romanian Kingdom and Bessarabia in terms of nation-building—but this topic is not elaborated because it does not fit Moruzi's broader agenda. Instead, Moruzi emphasizes the fundamental difference between the prejudices held by Bessarabians, ultimately the product of Russian propaganda and thus excusable, and those of the Kingdom Romanians. The latter stem either from ill will or ignorance and are the result, Moruzi contends, of "our laziness and carelessness."¹²¹

Another factor accounting for the distorted image of Bessarabians in the Romanian Kingdom was the reaction of the inhabitants of the three districts returned to Russia in 1878, who apparently welcomed the reinstatement of Russian administration. Moruzi strives to demonstrate that this region was the least Romanian part of Bessarabia and was thus not suitable as a test case for the national features of Bessarabian Romanians who remained essentially unknown to the wider Romanian public.¹²² This position was radically different from the official Romanian stance of 1878, which perceived the Budjak region as an integral part of the national body. The implications of this insistence on the complete knowledge of the "true Bessarabian people" are of course much broader. For Moruzi, the major prerequisite for a coordinated and efficient national policy is prior knowledge of all the parts of national heritage to be later redeemed by the emerging nation-state. The Romanian establishment failed to meet these requirements and was thus at risk of losing the symbolic war with the Russian Empire, even if there were other factors working in its favor. The solution envisaged by Moruzi and by most of his nationalist contemporaries concerned culture and cultural policy:

Our role, though, is to tread the just and peaceful road of culture [expressed through] brotherhood and the community of language and ideas. Let our brothers beyond the Prut give up their prejudice toward us as Papists or atheists, im-

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 88.

¹²² Ibid., 88–89.

moral and Judaized [*jidoviți*], let them forget that we hate and despise them; as for us, let us cease to think that the Bessarabians have betrayed us, that they are Russified and are renegades of their . . . origins. Let us learn to know them, and then we shall love them; let us teach them to know us, and then they will be proud of us.¹²³

This emphasis on the importance of spreading culture and enlightenment derives from the same intellectual influence of Iorga's circle, of which Moruzi was a minor member. For Moruzi, culture meant a truly national pedagogy that was the only remedy against the ever-present threat of “alienation.”¹²⁴

The image of Bessarabia that emerges from his work is not limited, however, to a regressive utopia stressing the innate virtues of the patriarchal local population. More in tune with the age of nationalism in which he was writing, Moruzi's argument at times resembled the appeal of a militant rather than the musings of an intellectual. Along with his insistence on the cultural factor, he felt that the study of this “dear and unfortunate province, torn from the very body of the Moldavian Principality, of the same Romanian blood as us”¹²⁵ was not only a necessity, but it was also “a patriotic duty to rekindle and consolidate our ethnic ties, so that [the future] events not find us unprepared.”¹²⁶ The “events” to which he was referring were, of course, the impending collapse of the Russian Empire and the final liberation of its peoples along national lines. In fact, Moruzi interpreted the 1905 Revolution as a temporary detour on the road to the final awakening of the empire's nationalities. He occasionally assumed a prophetic tone, as in the final phrases of his booklet where he proclaims “the end of ten centuries of tsarist slavery,” or in another passage comparing the Russian Revolution to “an agony whose inevitable result would be the death” of the Romanov state.¹²⁷ This prophetic streak was certainly far from original, but nowhere in Romanian literature on Bessarabia prior to World War I (except in some of Iorga's articles) was it expressed with such uninhibited violence.

The theme of Romanian ethnic resilience in Bessarabia hinted at the superficial nature of Russification and the purely material incentives that pushed the Bessarabian aristocracy and merchants toward closer integration into Russian society.¹²⁸ Moruzi, of course, did not see any contradic-

¹²³ Ibid., 110.

¹²⁴ A clear articulation of this view can be found in the introduction to Moruzi, *Înstrăinații*, 6.

¹²⁵ Moruzi, *Rușii și românii*, 85.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 110, 84.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 97–106.

tion between his constant recycling of the danger of ethnic alienation and his fundamentally optimistic view of the ethnic resistance of even the most Russified parts of local society. This contradiction does not even find a corresponding place in his hierarchy of collective identifications in which the national principle occupies a privileged position. His arguments for the ultimate failure of Russification can be grouped under three headings: ethnic-racialist, religious, and pragmatic.

The ethnic argument was based on the widespread belief in a racial hierarchy that differentiated the evolutionary potential of the three major European “families of peoples”: the Latin, Germanic, and Slavic “tribes.” As I have illustrated elsewhere, this pseudo-classification was invoked even by more moderate political and intellectual figures such as A. D. Xenopol and D. A. Sturdza as an explanatory scheme for the relative position of the Romanian Kingdom on the international stage. Moruzi used the same cliché in order to argue for the “innate superiority” of the Latin Romanian element in Bessarabia in comparison to the Slavs, thereby explaining the unsuccessful attempts to turn them into Slavs.¹²⁹ The same premise is used to justify the actions of the Bessarabian nobility, whose “Latin intelligence” is deemed superior to the “Slavic one” and is thus receptive to its national mission, even if this was temporarily obscured by the veil of tsarist autocracy.¹³⁰

The religious argument was constructed on the same model that Hasdeu used in his work *The Neva Pope*. Although a direct influence is improbable in this case, the emphasis on the fundamental difference of the Russian Church from all the other Orthodox Christians due to its subordination to the Russian tsar is present in Moruzi’s work.¹³¹ This device is consciously used to accentuate the difference between Orthodox Russians and Romanians since the author is keenly aware that the national essence of Bessarabians is especially endangered due to their religious proximity to Russians; indeed, effective assimilation required only a “change of name.”¹³² The institutional differences between the Church administrations thus represent a basic rupture between the “truly Orthodox” Romanians and the imperial Russians who substituted autocracy for Orthodoxy.

Finally, the pragmatic argument insisted on the greater relative significance of Bessarabia as part of Romania in comparison with its insignificant place within the Russian Empire. Moruzi is careful to warn his Bessarabian elite audience of the dangers of constitutionalism because “after the despotism of the autocracy they would encounter the despotism of parliamen-

¹²⁹ Moruzi, *Pribegi în țară răpită*, 405.

¹³⁰ Moruzi, *Rușii și românii*, 106.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 46–47; Moruzi, *Pribegi în țară răpită*, 404–5.

¹³² Moruzi, *Rușii și românii*, 20.

tary majorities, against which one can only fight with the help of numbers. Returning to its maternal fold, Bessarabia would represent at least one fifth of the Romanian state."¹³³ Here one can clearly discern a conservative and aristocratic bias, confirming Moruzi's rather ambiguous attitude toward democracy if not solidly entrenched in a national framework.

The pragmatic argument is turned on its head when Moruzi discusses the two categories of Russified Bessarabians that do not fit his national ideal. In a novel published in 1912, he again conflates pro-monarchical aristocratic and rightist elements (the "true Russians") with revolutionaries and identifies these two groups as the most pernicious for the "healthy" Romanian element.¹³⁴ Moruzi then scathingly refers to the 1912 celebration, stating that "these two categories will participate at the jubilee marking one hundred years of Russian domination . . . in the summer of 1912. They will be the only ones to surround the tsar, the first with the lust to gain personal profit, ranks, and decorations; the second, harboring a no less altruistic desire to send the tsar to the serene spheres [of heaven] . . . through the noble and valiant means of a dynamite bomb!"¹³⁵ In the same context, he makes an implicit comparison between the situation of Bessarabia and the "well-inhabited, rich, and flourishing shores of Dobrogea" that are parts of a world intrinsically opposed to the anachronistic Russian realm: a Romanian state that is defined as "free, independent, and European."¹³⁶ Thus, the pragmatism of the Russified Bessarabians is presented as false since it entailed the acceptance of a political and social order that was contrary to their own interests, if not contrary to the tendencies of contemporary social development. The implicit opposition between Romania and Russia postulates the superiority of the Romanian political and social order due to its purported national and social solidarity distinguishing it from the artificial patchwork of the Russian Empire. Moruzi bases his idealization of Romanian society on the principles of Iorga's national conservatism, using an even more one-sided lens that stresses the primacy of the national over the social and minimizes signs of social strain that beset the Romanian nation-state in the early twentieth century.¹³⁷

A final aspect worth emphasizing concerns the wider context in which this nationally optimistic author places the Bessarabian case. In order to support his claim about the resilience and "rebirth" of the local "Romanian nationality,"¹³⁸ Moruzi invokes the parallel with Alsace and Lorraine, which

¹³³ Ibid., 106.

¹³⁴ Moruzi, *Pribegi în țară răpită*, 401.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 402.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Moruzi, *Înstrăinații*, 7.

¹³⁸ Moruzi, *Pribegi în țară răpită*, 400.

became commonplace in Romanian literature of the early twentieth century. Contrary to most other references (including Iorga's), however, Moruzi employs this comparison to stress the legitimacy of German claims to the two French provinces, which are based on the national principle so important for his version of state nationalism. Bessarabia's position with respect to Romania is thus likened to the situation of Alsace: "The reintegration of the Alsatians into the German fatherland was much more difficult, and, despite this, it was achieved, not only through the force of arms, since blood does not turn into water!"¹³⁹ The author sacrifices his Franco-ophile position to uphold the "national interest," and his ethnocentrism reaches its apex in another work in which he develops the Bessarabia-Alsace parallel in much greater detail. The ritualistic phrases invoking blood and soil only serve to enhance the rhetorical effect. In his scheme, ethnicity (based on language) supersedes any considerations of civilizational superiority or cultural affinities. The following passage is worth quoting at length since it illustrates Moruzi's complete vision of Bessarabia's place within Romania and its "shallow ties" to the Russian imperial state:

For 210 years, Alsatian Germany [sic] remained under French administration, without losing either its language and its national costume, or its customs and traditions. It even acquired a certain affinity for its conquerors due to the fact that its German brothers were still suffering under a feudal regime, while it enjoyed the human rights proclaimed by the First French Republic. It therefore fought with German bravery and obstinacy against its German brothers. . . . Memories of shared glories and suffering, multiple kinship relations took place between the conquerors and the conquered; such ties never occurred between the Russians and the Bessarabians. The language, however, the German language, the German mores and customs remained unaffected, like a misunderstood mission that nevertheless foreshadowed the future. Even when the day of reintegration into the nation arrived, this holy mission was not understood, and the Alsatians fought against their blood brothers to defend . . . France. Today, however, after only forty years of German domination, the Alsatians have again become Germans in language, clothing, and character [*fire*], ready to defend the German fatherland with the same bravery and obstinacy!¹⁴⁰

Moruzi reiterates the same point in the concluding remarks of his work, shifting the emphasis but not the essence of his argument by introducing a direct opposition between Bessarabia and Alsace. This time the author employs a strategy of asking rhetorical questions, concluding that despite the radical difference between the attitude of the French toward their Alsatian citizens and that of the Russian government toward its Bessarabian

¹³⁹ Moruzi, *Rușii și românii*, 100.

¹⁴⁰ Moruzi, *Pribegi în țară răpită*, 402–3.

subjects, any policy of integration is doomed to fail given the resilience of the “national essence.”¹⁴¹ The national character thus turns into an immutable feature that cannot be affected by history. Progress is relative compared to the national features that are its only framework and that have a primary and determining influence on a community’s development.

In conclusion, Moruzi’s reading of the Bessarabian case is both more straightforward and radical than other contemporary examples of the same discourse. This radicalism, however, has no social connotation and is a combination of militant and conservative nationalism with a personal streak of local nostalgia evident in some of his poems with a local Bessarabian flavor.¹⁴² Moruzi in fact develops a personal utopia featuring a traditional and immobile Bessarabian peasant society that fits his ideal image of the Romanian nation rather than reality. The author is aware of this contradiction and seeks to transcend it by endowing his highly personal prose with sociological observations. In the end, the frustrations of this marginal official and intellectual found an outlet through the imagining of Bessarabia that transferred the alienating reality of early twentieth-century Romania into a space of tradition and the eternal past that was distorted by the pernicious influence of a foreign power, but which had the potential to infuse new energy into the Romanian intelligentsia’s project of national restoration.

Stere—The Legal Revolutionary

The figure of Constantin Stere is perhaps the most emblematic of the notion of “refugee” used in the title of this chapter. Although Stere played a central role in contemporary ideological debates, an acute sense of marginality followed him throughout his life as the most outspoken representative of Bessarabian-born intellectuals in Romanian politics and a controversial political activist accused of treason and double-dealing. The following discussion will focus only on the first part of Stere’s public life in the Romanian Kingdom from the turn of the twentieth century up to and partly including World War I. Specifically, it will not address Stere’s importance as a social theorist and political doctrinaire and his involvement in the populist (*poporanist*) ideology and movement in the first decade of the twentieth century.¹⁴³ This analysis will not go beyond World War I to trace the con-

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 404–5.

¹⁴² Moruzi, *Cântece basarabene*, 15–16.

¹⁴³ For a detailed discussion of Stere’s contribution to the *poporanist* current, see Zigu Ornea, *Poporanismul* [Romanian populism] (Bucharest: Editura Academiei RSR, 1972); and also Zigu Ornea, *Viața lui Constantin Stere* [The life of Con-

volved path of Stere's involvement in the organization and theoretical elaboration of the peasantist doctrine in the 1920s. Stere's populist framework for analyzing social phenomena will only figure here insofar as it is relevant to his stance on Bessarabia, emphasizing the impact of his ideological platform in comparison with Hasdeu and Moruzi.

Both these differences and the inherent continuities that embedded Stere's visions of Bessarabia in the mainstream national narrative will be highlighted. Stere's position on Romania's foreign policy during the period of Romanian neutrality in World War I (1914–16) is especially significant as an illustration of the dilemmas that a consistently anti-Russian discourse entailed for an intellectual who challenged the prevailing current of public opinion, insisting on Bessarabia's privileged position in the hierarchy of Romanian irredentist claims. Stere's awkward position within the Romanian establishment should be noted not only due to his political preferences, but also due to his personal experience as an exile in both Russia and Romania and to the uncertain identity that these experiences engendered. The tension between Stere's prominence as a political thinker and his failure as a politician created a distorted view of his personality in contemporary circles, producing an image of a towering yet isolated figure who remained estranged from the Romanian intellectual milieu of the early 1890s, if not culturally, then psychologically and intellectually.

The biographical element in Stere's self-construction is more significant than in the case of the two other Bessarabian émigrés. Unlike Hasdeu and Moruzi, Stere was directly shaped by his youth in the Russian Empire. The two most fundamental formative experiences in this respect were his personal experience as a prisoner in Siberia and his intellectual and political immersion in the world of Russian populism. Born in 1865 into a family of petty noble landowners in Northern Bessarabia, Stere obtained his secondary education in Kishinev where he likely entered local revolutionary circles grouped around the People's Will¹⁴⁴ in the early 1880s. He quickly gained prominence among his colleagues due to his intellectual abilities and his organizational skills, but his active phase as a revolutionary ended abruptly upon his graduation from the local gymnasium when he was arrested along with most of his collaborators in May 1884.¹⁴⁵ After spending

stantin Stere], vol. 1 (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1989). A useful volume of Stere's selected works was published by Ornea in 1979: Constantin Stere, *Scrisori* [Writings] (Bucharest: Minerva, 1979). For a synthetic presentation of the Romanian variant of populism espoused by Stere, see Keith Hitchins, *România: 1866–1947* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2004), 82–86.

¹⁴⁴ Russian clandestine revolutionary organization, famous for its strategy of terror. Its members carried out the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881.

¹⁴⁵ Interestingly, this incident generated a strong reaction from local intellectuals, which shows to what extent such occurrences were atypical for the Bessarabian

a year in prison in Odessa, he was sentenced to exile in western Siberia, and later, due to his involvement in suspicious activities in his place of detention, his sentence was extended and he was transferred to a much less hospitable environment. During this period of existential upheaval, he abandoned his earlier radical brand of populism in favor of a more reformist variant advocating gradual change through legal means instead of violent revolution.¹⁴⁶ He also had the means to educate himself by reading works on positivist philosophy and political economy, which indicated his early penchant for sociological approaches to political and moral problems.

His period of exile also witnessed the emergence of a tension between the social and national aspects of his worldview. This tension later characterized Stere's particular stance in different periods of his political activity. Although social aspects clearly predominated, the nationalizing tendency held the upper hand in moments of crisis; for example, during the neutrality debates on foreign policy or in the later phase of Romanian involvement in the war when he outlined his most cogent view on the "Bessarabian question." Stere himself acknowledged his indebtedness to his early Russian milieu and the impact of his revolutionary activities on his attitude toward national issues: "Our entire generation reached national consciousness not through any direct influence from the [Romanian] Kingdom, but through the Russian revolutionary current. [This happened] through contact with the popular masses required by a revolutionary's duty since, from the first steps of descending 'to the people,' we discovered that besides way of life and social hierarchy, language and the external form of culture separate us [from them]."¹⁴⁷

However, Stere perceived this influence in intellectual rather than practical terms. In a polemical piece written as a reaction to Gherea's main

"backwater." An account of the event, as well as eloquent portraits of the protagonists (including Stere himself) can be found in G. Bezviconi, ed., *"Amintiri din Basarabia: 1884-1891"* [Memories from Bessarabia: 1884-1891], *Convorbiri Literare* (June 1940): 533-35. This is a Romanian-language edition of the private journal of M. C. Zozulin, a high-ranking Bessarabian bureaucrat at the time, that also contains other interesting details about Bessarabia during the 1880s.

¹⁴⁶ During the early 1930s, the Soviet press purportedly uncovered a "repentance letter" written by Stere to the chief of the Gendarmes in 1888 when his health was deteriorating. Stere never recognized his authorship, though the authenticity of this document is highly plausible. It is clear, however, that by the late 1880s Stere was no longer a radical populist. For a discussion of this letter and the stages of Stere's political evolution during this period, see Ornea, *Viața lui Constantin Stere*, 99-101.

¹⁴⁷ Constantin Stere, *Preludii: Partidul Național Țărănesc și "cazul Stere"* [Preludes: The National Peasant Party and the "Stere Case"] (Bucharest: "Adevărul," 1930), 21.

theoretical work, Stere denies having any expertise on the rural question in Russia and on Great Russian issues in particular due to the irrelevance of his personal experience in this respect. In a characteristic gesture of self-denial, he emphasizes his marginal status in contemporary Russian society, which he views either from a geographically or a socially peripheral position: "I am forced to make, once and for all, a 'sensational' confession. I can say that I have not lived a single day in Russia. Aside from Bessarabia, I only know Siberia and the [tsarist] prisons—and Mr. Gherea will not claim that Russia can be reduced to that. I know the Russian peasant only very indirectly, and I have never been a peasantist [*țărănist*] in Russia. I have displayed a constant dislike for bogus peasantism [*țărănismul de operetă*]." ¹⁴⁸ Stere used this argument of ignorance in stark contrast to his usually confident and expert-like discourse on Russian matters not only to conceal his uneasiness vis-à-vis Gherea's position, but also to distance himself from the stigma of his Russian background that surfaced all too often in his critics' commentaries. His reluctance to recognize the influence of Russian populism on the *poporanist* current served a similar purpose of distancing himself from his past as a revolutionary and an internal exile in the Russian Empire. ¹⁴⁹

After returning to Bessarabia from his administrative exile in late 1891 or early 1892, Stere immigrated to Romania in November 1892. Like Hasdeu, Stere's early biography was often romanticized by contemporaries who turned his stigmatized status as an émigré from the Russian Empire into an essential trait of his personality that determined not only his political options, but also his peculiar status in the Romanian cultural and political milieu. Unlike Hasdeu, however, Stere did not promote his self-image as an exile until later in life in his autobiographical novel. ¹⁵⁰ This was amply compensated for by the image constructed around the circumstances of his immigration to Romania and the cliché of the revolutionary hero (or villain) used as a label to define Stere's position in the political landscape. Like Hasdeu, the problem of Stere's legal status in Romania led to conflicting interpretations that sought to present his immigration as an exceptional experience that would enhance his status as a refugee from a hostile and

¹⁴⁸ C. Stere, "'Neoiobăgia' dlui Gherea," *Viața Românească* [Romanian life], no. 11 (1910): 254. Cited in Z. Ornea, *Viața lui Constantin Stere*, 98.

¹⁴⁹ Ornea, *Viața lui Constantin Stere*, 150.

¹⁵⁰ However, it would be an exaggeration to interpret Stere's reluctance to exploit his experience of exile as a conscious evasion strategy. In 1914, for example, he published a semi-fictional sketch powerfully evoking the time he spent in Siberia, entitled *În voia valurilor: Icoane din Siberia* [In the waves' power: Icons from Siberia], which he used as the basis for his later novel. Stere was rather careful to disassociate his image as a public figure from these personal experiences, which was not the case with most of his political followers and opponents.

foreign environment. Reviewing the various versions of the events surrounding Stere's departure from the Russian Empire—including “escaping from Siberia” and “fleeing beyond the Prut”—Stere's biographer has concluded that these conjectures are not credible and were concocted in order to better connect the personal dimension of Stere's exile to his political Russophobia.¹⁵¹

After acquiring Romanian citizenship in 1895, Stere's Russian background ceased to have legal consequences, but it continued to generate a persistent ambiguity in the public's perception that did not fit the usual pattern of a Romanian politician. Stere's simultaneous belonging to and estrangement from the realm of national policy and discourse derived from his double position as the most vocal representative of the Bessarabian theme in the Romanian public sphere of the early twentieth century and from his immersion in the alien universe of the Russian Empire that shaped his moral and social positions. While Stere's sensitivity toward national issues was viewed as a manifestation of his marginal status as a Bessarabian, his propensity to emphasize the social dimension of reform was linked to his adoption of the moral and political ethos of the Russian intelligentsia. Aside from the superficial level of Stere's foreignness symbolized by the self-assumed nickname “the Siberian” in political circles, many later commentators emphasized the peculiarity of Stere's psychological type. The implication was that Stere's personal character did not fit the national character of the Romanian people, or at least the collective traits of the country's political elite, leading to his isolation and failure to fully integrate into the Romanian political system.

Defending this psychological interpretation of Stere's career, the publicist Pamfil Șeicaru asserts that “throughout his hectic life, he remained unchanged, in the same [mental] shape he acquired as a young revolutionary raised in the specific atmosphere of the Russian revolutionary milieu, just like Siberia molded his sensibility.”¹⁵² In a further development of the same thesis, Șeicaru reinforces his unconvincing but revealing point: “Fundamentally, Stere was an uprooted person, a permanent exile; as a Bessarabian Moldavian, [he was] an exile in the Russian world and, later, as an ex-revolutionary and deportee, [he was] an exile within Romanian life.”¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Stere himself denied that he was a refugee and apparently produced a passport issued by the Bessarabian governor, A. Konstantinovich, granting him free passage to Romania. Stere's version seems all the more plausible since he pursued his education at the University of Iași, which might have justified granting him a passport. See Ornea, *Viața lui Constantin Stere*, 137.

¹⁵² Pamfil Șeicaru, *Un singuratec: C. Stere* [A loner: C. Stere] (Madrid: Editura Carpați, 1956), 5.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 6.

This image—important, of course, not as an explanatory tool for Stere's activities, but as an indication of the place he achieved in the popular consciousness of the period—led to fundamental ambiguity and displacement that had not only morally devastating but also politically crippling consequences. Șeicaru does not hesitate to make this explicit in the following passage:

C. Stere lived with a [truly] Romanian intensity through all the [epoch's] political problems. His love for the Romanian land, his passion for Bessarabia, his preoccupation with the future of the Romanian nation [*neamului*] are obvious, but it is no less obvious that his spiritual formation, his intellectual sensitivity remained, till the very end, under Russian intellectual influence. This is perhaps the explanation . . . for the isolation that he felt throughout his entire life. Into that [Romanian] climate of ironic liveliness [*vioiciune zeflemistă*] he brought seriousness, a grave preoccupation with the problems of [human] existence. This [feature] made him singular; it made him unable to spiritually integrate into the [Romanian] environment.¹⁵⁴

Despite Stere's apparent success as a public figure and political ideologist, his constant failures as a politician, which worsened after World War I due to accusations of collaboration with the German occupation authorities, were interpreted not as the result of contingent factors, but as the consequence of deeply embedded psychological differences that prevented him from adapting to the Kingdom's political mores. Whereas Stere perceived himself primarily as a political thinker and public intellectual—in both of these roles he eminently, if falteringly, succeeded both as a proponent of *poporanism* before 1914 and peasantism after the war—his Russian-inspired social reformism made him the *bête noire* of the Romanian political mainstream.¹⁵⁵ However, the transfer of political differences to the realm of mentalities proved to what extent the theme of uncertain identity influenced the trajectory of the careers and public images of Bessarabian émigrés in Romania. Even when Stere's reformist agenda was ultimately accepted by the Liberal establishment and the National-Peasant Party after the war, the problematic nature of his personal identity affected his status as a public figure. Although Stere's marginality cannot be explained only or

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁵⁵ In this sense, the parallels between Stere's political ideas and the Socialist Revolutionary current in Russia are not completely misplaced. Stere's variant of peasant-oriented populism never reached the theoretical sophistication of Social Democracy, even in its Romanian "soft version" represented by Gherea's doctrinal works of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. For an interesting analysis of Stere's peculiar position in the ideological debates of his era, see Ornea, *Viața lui Constantin Stere*, 152 and ff., 355–85.

even mostly by the stigma of his Russian background and his Bessarabian origins, the psychological lens through which his contemporaries interpreted his peculiarity and Stere's own acknowledgement of the formative impact of his early traumatic experience in Siberia and of his indebtedness to Russian intellectual sources reveal the importance of such external factors.

Stere's articulation of a coherent vision of Bessarabia emerged mainly on two occasions, both linked to the revolutionary turmoil in the Russian Empire in the early twentieth century. Though acutely aware of his own identity as a Bessarabian,¹⁵⁶ he only wrote extensively about Bessarabia in times of crisis or when he was actively engaged in local politics. In contrast to the two previous figures, Stere directly witnessed and participated in the fledgling local intelligentsia's efforts to exploit the revolutionary crisis of 1905 in order to advance the cause of social reform and (only very timidly) cultural autonomy. Stere undertook his first trip to Kishinev apparently with the consent, if not the direct financial support, of the Romanian government at the height of the revolutionary events in early December 1905. Especially important for his position during this period are two articles that he wrote for the Liberal newspaper *L'indépendance Roumaine* in December 1905. Praising the October Manifesto (in an optimistic phase of his analysis of Russia's situation) as an opportunity to gradually emancipate the non-Russian peripheries according to the principle of national autonomy, Stere says the following in regard to Bessarabia's future: "During this period of transformation, the last stage will lead to a new Russia where every race will be able to develop according to its own genius, following the solemn promises of the imperial decree. The role of the Romanian intellectuals from Bessarabia is definitively fixed. The duty of Bessarabia's Romanian intelligentsia is to dedicate itself today to the cause of preserving the race, to the cause of civilization and order."¹⁵⁷

Stere fully internalized Romanian national discourse—here his use of the term "race" as synonymous with a national community is particularly revealing—though at this stage his militant nationalism was expressed by default rather than through a full-fledged platform. The importance of the organic rhetoric of the nation is visible even at this early stage and constitutes one of the obvious commonalities with the other two figures discussed above and with the Romanian national narrative in general. During his stay

¹⁵⁶ Occasionally, this awareness led to a defensive stance pointing to the difficulties that this status entailed for his career prospects and academic performance. His initial difficulty in mastering standard Romanian was especially prominent in this sense. See Ornea, *Viața lui Constantin Stere*, 227.

¹⁵⁷ Stere, "Bessarabie," *L'indépendance Roumaine*, November 30/December 13, 1905. Cited in Ornea, *Viața lui Constantin Stere*, 344.

in Kishinev, Stere combined his national and social agendas. While contributing significantly to the preparations for the publication of the first local Romanian-language newspaper, he also wrote a series of articles in early 1906 that specifically emphasized the agrarian question.¹⁵⁸ The importance of his mission to Bessarabia and its quasi-official character was also evidenced by the vehement reaction of Krushevan's newspaper to Stere's presence in Kishinev. Bessarabian officials and right-wing journalists were clearly aware of the potential dangers that Stere's organizational skills posed, especially the threat of catalyzing the consolidation of the local opposition movement.¹⁵⁹ There are good grounds to believe that he was directly involved in coordinating local conspiratorial circles that were forming during the period of heightened political turmoil in the winter and spring of 1906.¹⁶⁰

However, the period of Stere's active interest in Bessarabian affairs came to an end later during 1906 when he was forced to return to Romania. He limited his contribution to Bessarabian developments by providing logistical and partly financial assistance and by consulting local militants on the best strategies to appease the Russian authorities and articulate specific economic and cultural demands that dominated the revolutionary agenda. On this occasion, however, Stere failed to propose a coherent idea of Bessarabia as part of Romanian national discourse. His generally democratic and socially informed rhetoric that viewed the Russian Empire in a negative light faced the dilemma of creating an attractive Romanian alternative for the emerging local Bessarabian opposition and elevating Bessarabia in the Romanian national imagination. The tension between Stere's preoccupation with social and national issues fused together in a powerful critique of the Russian imperial regime, but did not produce a true alternative discourse since the Romanian societal model did not live up to his populist standards.

Stere's discourse changed dramatically during the intense debates on Romania's international position during World War I. Nationalistic overtones became much more pronounced in his writings and in his public speeches as well. His importance as one of the most vocal defenders of the pro-German position will be discussed later. In general, the main topics that he addressed in the framework of the polemics raging during the neutrality period concerned the myth of Russian expansionism that would have catastrophic consequences for the future of the Romanian state. A second

¹⁵⁸ Ornea, *Viața lui Constantin Stere*, 345.

¹⁵⁹ C. Stere, "Basarabia și revoluția din 1905" [Bessarabia and the 1905 Revolution], in Constantin Stere, *Marele războiu și politica României* [The Great War and Romania's policy] (Bucharest: Lumina, 1918), 91.

¹⁶⁰ Ornea, *Viața lui Constantin Stere*, 346–47.

major argument that made Stere a staunch defender of the Bessarabian agenda was his concept of the integral national ideal that he developed in order to avoid the accusation of privileging Romanian irredentism in Bessarabia at the expense of other Romanian-inhabited territories. His premise derived from the purportedly closer historical connection between Bessarabia's history and Romanian statehood, and also from an almost obsessive insistence on the danger of short-term advantages or territorial gains in Transylvania that would only delay the final advent of Russian hegemony that would ultimately engulf both the Romanian Kingdom and Transylvania.¹⁶¹

Aside from the specific arguments devoted to these issues, Stere provided a glimpse of his concept of the Romanian nation that displayed striking similarities to the opinions of the more conservative authors analyzed above. In his conception, the nation appears as an organic totality that can only reach its full potential through the reintegration of all the severed parts of the national body. The author does not hesitate to mix the arguments of historical continuity, the borderland character of the Romanians, and the organic nature of national development to present a rhetorically compelling vision of Romania's national destiny:

We, gentlemen, are not a conquering people. If the elements that entered into the composition of this nation [*neam*] have come from other places, we, however, were born on this earth, we have grown directly from it; so, we cannot give up even one atom (sic) from the nation's domain [*țarina neamului*]. Each and every Romanian element contributed to the creation of the Romanian soul, which is one and the same everywhere. And the fact that we have remained here, at the frontiers of three civilizations, gives us, perhaps, the power to later bring our own . . . contribution to the thesaurus of common human civilization. (Applause.) And, gentlemen, especially in what concerns Bukovina and Bes-

¹⁶¹ Stere expressed his position on the problem of Russian expansionism and the Romanian course of action in foreign policy on three major occasions between December 1914 and early 1916. These three works are: Constantin Stere, *România și războiul European* [Romania and the European war] (Iași: Editura Revistei Viața Românească, 1915); Constantin Stere and Petre P. Carp, *Politica externă a României. Cuvântările rostite în ședințele Camerei Deputaților din 15 și 16 decembrie 1915* [Romania's foreign policy: The speeches given by P. P. Carp and C. Stere during the sessions of the Chamber of Deputies on December 15 and 16, 1915] (Iași: Editura Revistei Viața Românească, 1915); and finally, Constantin Stere, *Discursul D-lui Take Ionescu: Studiu critic* [Mr. Take Ionescu's speech: A critical study] (Iași: Editura Revistei Viața Românească, 1916). The last two publications reflected on the debates on Romania's future involvement in the war that took place in the Romanian parliament in December 1915. Stere's role in this controversy has been analyzed in Ornea, *Viața lui Constantin Stere*, 102–18, and will be examined in the next chapter.

sarabia, which were a part of ancient Moldavia, they have shared their entire history with the Romanians from the Kingdom. Our [Bessarabian] ancestors, like your ancestors, have lived together under Alexander the Good, under Stephen the Great, and under John the Terrible! There is not a single particle [*pulbere*] of Romanian land that does not also contain a drop of their blood and a molecule of their bones! We have built this State together. . . . The nation is a living being that persists through the centuries. We are but transitory links in the unending chain of generations, so not only do you not have the right to give up the graves of the ancestors that lie beyond the Prut, but you also do not have the right to give up the Romanian life from those territories for the sake of the generations to come.¹⁶²

Stere's maneuvering in the contemporary Romanian public sphere thus displays a certain ambiguity beyond the personal dimension. While sharing the basic premises and notions of mainstream discourse, he differed from most of his contemporaries in regard to the priorities of nation-building and the methods required to achieve national unity. Despite his claims to the contrary, he also thought in terms of a hierarchy of national territories that privileged Bessarabia. His pro-Bessarabian argument rested on a number of assumptions, including the perceived civilizational inferiority of the Russian Empire, expressed mainly in political, but also in moral and economic terms; the stronger claim to historical continuity that Bessarabia shared with the other parts of the Kingdom and which differentiated it from Transylvania; the greater danger of assimilation to which Bessarabian Romanians were exposed in comparison to their Transylvanian conationals due to the latter's more organized resistance and to the weakness of the Hungarians' assimilatory capacity; and the pragmatic advantages that an alliance with the Central Powers guaranteed in the face of a Russian Empire that could only build its relations with Romania through the logic of a zero-sum game. Though these themes were present throughout his earlier writings, an articulate version of Stere's position on the "Bessarabian question" was elaborated only after Romania's disastrous involvement in World War I—more precisely, at the lowest ebb of military fortunes when Romania was on the brink of collapse in the late autumn and winter of 1917.

While residing in the Romanian capital at the end of 1917, Stere began editing the first and only Romanian-language newspaper in the occupied zone. While advocating a pro-German position out of personal conviction and pragmatic necessity, Stere pursued his two-pronged agenda of social reform and militant nationalism akin to his prewar stance.¹⁶³ He later re-

¹⁶² Stere and Carp, *Politica externă a României*, 43–45.

¹⁶³ An account of the historical context and significance of the *Lumina* [The light] newspaper can be found in Ornea, *Viața lui Constantin Stere*, 173–78.

published his editorials in a separate volume that was the most detailed and coherent illustration of Stere's opinions on the burning national and social issues that dominated public debate in this time of crisis.¹⁶⁴ In keeping with his pro-German stance, he envisaged Romania's future in a close alliance with the seemingly victorious Central Powers that would eventually confirm Romania's entry into the political and economic complex of *Mittleuropa*.¹⁶⁵ The future of Romania's institutions and the opportunity for effective democratization, as well as the fulfillment of the national ideal were linked, in Stere's view, to Romania's geopolitical realignment within the sphere of German hegemony.¹⁶⁶ Along with the revolutionary events in the Russian Empire that precipitated the developments in Bessarabia, Stere devoted much of his attention to the significance of Bessarabia's integration into Romania and to the adaptability of prewar Romanian nationalism to the shifting circumstances.

Stere constructed a two-sided argument that emphasized the already familiar topics outlined above and the impossibility of reaching any compromise with Russia. At the same time, these articles represented a rebuttal of the Romanian nationalism promoted by such figures as Iorga and A. C. Cuza, whom Stere accused of hollowness, wishful thinking, lacking an efficient national strategy, and even outright hypocrisy and bad faith.¹⁶⁷ The author's interpretation of the “Bessarabian question” derived from the same organic model that informed his opponents' views. However, Stere tended to portray the Russian-Romanian controversy as one characterized by interstate conflict, using legalistic arguments that matched neither the Romantic nor the conservative model. In this scheme, 1878 played the role of a foundational event to the same extent as the other emblematic date of 1812. The explanation for this emphasis on later events can be found in the symbolic importance that Stere attached to the “Russian felony” that deprived a faithful ally of a part of its inalienable “physical being.”¹⁶⁸ In fact, Stere conflated the moral and material consequences of the 1878 contro-

¹⁶⁴ Constantin Stere, *Marele războiu și politica României* [The Great War and Romania's policy] (Bucharest: Lumina, 1918).

¹⁶⁵ The concept of *Mittleuropa*, in the sense of a German-dominated space encompassing most of Central Europe, gained prominence during World War I and was popularized in Friedrich Naumann's book of the same name (1915).

¹⁶⁶ Ornea, *Viața lui Constantin Stere*, 177.

¹⁶⁷ The condemnation of the ignorance, indifference, and the distorted and counterproductive visions of such nationalists is especially poignant in two articles of the series: “Basarabia și ‘Țara-Mumă’” [Bessarabia and the “Mother-Country”] (October 26, 1917); and “Naționalism?...” [Nationalism?] (December 17, 1917), in *Marele războiu și politica României*, 96–99, and 103–5.

¹⁶⁸ Stere, “Idealul național” [The national ideal] (October 1, 1917), in *Marele războiu și politica României*, 79–80.

versy and regarded any collaboration with the Russian Empire as tantamount to an effective sanction of the “terrible act” that ran counter not only to Romania’s traditional foreign policy, but also to the opinions of its “founding fathers”: Kogălniceanu and I. C. Brătianu.¹⁶⁹

The same argumentative logic prompted him to equate, in a characteristic turn of phrase, the claim to Bessarabia with the French claim to Alsace-Lorraine. The Romanian case for Bessarabia appeared even more legitimate since it rested on a firm historical basis:

If someone in France had suggested an anti-British alliance with Germany during this war, he would have surely fallen under the opprobrium of the public. But France lost Alsace and Lorraine nine years before us, and it lost them in a just fight, not through a stab in the back on the part of an ally. Moreover, Alsace and Lorraine were but provinces once conquered by France, but inhabited mostly by Germans, and they do not have as much significance for France from any point of view as the ancient land of Stephen’s archers and of John the Terrible does for us.¹⁷⁰

The metaphor of the national body of which Bessarabia was a severed and suffering part repeatedly surfaced in Stere’s presentation of the situation in Bessarabia under Russian domination. Not only was he not content with depicting Russian policy in his native province in the bleakest of colors, but he also sought to undermine the official Russian topos of liberation from the Ottoman yoke. Invoking the legal guarantees that were introduced in the legislative acts confirming Bessarabia’s autonomous status and deploring its subsequent liquidation, Stere uses the metaphor of the “ordeal” to define Bessarabia’s regression from an “emancipated” to an “annexed” country subjected to a “yoke a thousand times crueler” than that of the Ottomans.¹⁷¹ Though he does not elaborate further on this comparison between the two empires, the exceptional intrusiveness and brutality of Russia is a recurring theme in Stere’s portrayal of Bessarabia. This image, however, is not as clear-cut as it may seem. The tsarist empire appears in Stere’s writings in two ways: as a “colossus on clay feet” that is doomed to disappear due to its internal weakness and the growing revolutionary movement, and as a mortal danger to Romania’s existence due to its unbridled expansionism. This contradiction, which Stere’s critics did not fail to notice in the polemics preceding Romania’s entry into the war, is, of course, inherent in the discourse on empire in general. Writing at the time of Russia’s revolutionary upheaval in the autumn of 1917, Stere did not

¹⁶⁹ Stere, *Marele războiu și politica României*, 79, 97, 101–2, and 103–5.

¹⁷⁰ Stere, “Idealul național,” 81.

¹⁷¹ Stere, “Din calvarul Basarabiei” [From Bessarabia’s ordeal], in *Marele războiu și politica României*, 86–87.

moderate his discourse on Russia despite the monarchy's demise because he perceived the long-standing tendencies of Russian policy as independent of its form of government. This note on continuity should alert one to the artificiality of the World War I divide, and it should also raise the question of how the discursive form changed in the case of intellectuals who remained active throughout the prewar and interwar periods.

Stere's organic analogies reached their apex in a synthetic article devoted to a brief description of Bessarabia's social and psychological situation under Russian administration.¹⁷² This article is especially interesting because one can identify a few moments of intertextual communication between the authors discussed in this chapter. In fact, Stere's article is a slightly altered and abridged version of Moruzi's account of Bessarabia's social composition, repeating many of the same clichés and expressions. While it is impossible to state exactly when Stere discovered and read Moruzi's work, it is impossible to deny that he had encountered Moruzi's writings at some point. This borrowing illustrates how nationalistic rhetorical devices were interchangeable, even if the respective authors did not necessarily share each other's viewpoints. Stere was as far removed ideologically from Moruzi's regressive utopia as possible, but the two writers agreed on the substance of the national idea. The suspension of his social acumen as a result of his obsession with the priorities of the national project also helps explain Stere's collaboration with the Conservatives both before and after Romania's entry into the war.¹⁷³

In the same article, Stere inveighs against the Cuza-Iorga brand of nationalism in unequivocal terms: "We are very nationalist. The 'National League' [The League for the Cultural Unity of All Romanians, led by Iorga—A.C.] was preoccupied with [the fate of] the Romanians from Istria, from Macedonia, and even from Bithynia, and waged violent campaigns for all the 'cadrilater'¹⁷⁴ in the world—but who has ever been interested in Bessarabia?"¹⁷⁵ The recurring theme of ignorance and indifference was a central point in Stere's plan to overturn the hierarchy of national priorities and place Bessarabia in a privileged position at the top of the national agenda, though it made his task all the more arduous. In another passage, the author complains that "this creek [the Prut] could, for more than a

¹⁷² "Cimitirul" [The graveyard] is the title of the article and Stere's chosen designation for the lethargic (if not terminal) phase of the local population's self-awareness. See *ibid.*, 87–90.

¹⁷³ Ornea, *Viața lui Constantin Stere*, 113–15.

¹⁷⁴ A reference to Southern Dobrogea, annexed by Romania in 1913 as a result of the Second Balkan War and known as the "Cadrilater" (The Quadrangle). The territory was returned to Bulgaria in September 1940.

¹⁷⁵ Stere, *Marele războiu și politica României*, 87.

century, separate so deeply a significant part of the Romanian people [from the others] that in Romania one can certainly find much more exact information about Indo-China and Paraguay than about Bessarabia—whereas in Bessarabia they know even less about Romania. And how could it be otherwise? [I]f Russian censorship was aided by the complete indifference of those from the Kingdom?”¹⁷⁶

This intentional exaggeration was reinforced by the systematic comparison between the underinvestment and disinterest in Bessarabia and the overly enthusiastic engagement with the clearly peripheral and insignificant movement of the Romanians (Vlachs) from Macedonia. Even more so than Moruzi, Stere used Macedonia as an ideal counter-example for Bessarabia’s marginal status since it was even less important for the Romanian national project. However, the Macedonian case was of paramount importance for Stere as an illustration of the hollow, primitive, and inflated rhetoric of official nationalism (represented mostly by Iorga and A. C. Cuza) that Stere abhorred.¹⁷⁷ In Stere’s view, the flawed essence of this “pseudo-nationalism” was revealed on several occasions, including the very weak reaction to the 1912 anniversary and the attacks against Bessarabian students in Iași accused of being “Judeo-Russian agents” in Iorga’s newspaper during the 1905 Revolution.¹⁷⁸ Beyond Iorga’s and Cuza’s ambiguous positions on the anti-Semitism of Russian authorities and their occasional flirtation with the Russian right-wing press, the conflict between Stere and Cuza on specific issues related to national strategy arose not only due to their ideological and personal differences, but also because of their competition to define the nationalist and irredentist program that undermined any possibility of collaboration.

These internal conflicts did not differ significantly in terms of nationalist rhetoric. The distinguishing feature of Stere’s political thought was the reversal of national priorities that placed Bessarabia at the center of the state- and nation-building process. True to his almost literal conception of the national body, Stere thus concludes one of his articles on Bessarabia: “In our national preoccupations, Bessarabia had to occupy *the first place*. [It is so] because if we bow in front of brutal force, if we resign ourselves to bear the wound inflicted not only on our national dignity, but also on *our physical unity*, on our integrity, *we [will] lose the right to any other aspiration in*

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 104–5. Stere also preferred the Macedonian example due to the competition for funding that the Macedonian “lobby” successfully won, whereas Stere himself was not very successful in securing money for Bessarabian students even in his position as the rector of the University of Iași in 1913–16.

¹⁷⁸ Stere, “Basarabia și ‘Țara-Mumă’” [Bessarabia and the “Mother-Country”] (October 26, 1917), in *Marele război și politica României*, 95.

History.¹⁷⁹ Stere ostensibly repeated the arguments invoked during the 1878 controversy, identifying the southern districts with the entire province, but in the changed context of war and revolution the claim to symbolic inclusion was much more pronounced.

A final strategy Stere used to strengthen his point about Bessarabia's essential belonging to Romania was linked to a legal argument. This thesis was developed in one of the articles in the series that even with its title subverted the customary center-periphery hierarchy and claimed an agency for the Bessarabian population that it obviously lacked.¹⁸⁰ In an argument echoing the Russian claim that Romania could not advance any territorial demands on Bessarabia because no Romanian state existed in 1812, Stere asserts that “Romania has not only the historical right, but also the obligation toward Bessarabia, and even toward the whole of Moldavia, to reclaim the districts beyond the Prut that were part of ancient Moldavia, [s]ince those circumstances that motivated and justified” Russian protection of Bessarabia were no longer valid.¹⁸¹ Beyond the historical and ethnographic continuity that the Romanian nation-state could and did invoke in relation to Bessarabia, Stere argued for the much more tenuous legal continuity of Bessarabia's place within Romania.

In the aforementioned article, Stere presents the 1812 annexation as “a brutal deed, an abuse of force, without any legal basis: it was neither a conquest, because we have not been at war, nor a voluntary cession confirmed by a treaty between [Russia and] Romania.”¹⁸² Behind this seemingly naïve argument, Stere probably intended to impress the reading public with his professional legal expertise (he was a professor of constitutional law at the University of Iași), concluding that

legally, then, it [Bessarabia] is still a part of Romania, which did not give its sanction [to the annexation]—and neither did it have the right to do so. . . . Thus, no treaty agreed to by us and no law . . . could sanction the annexation according to our Constitution, even if Romania had wanted it: the Romanian people of Bessarabia would be entitled to deny any government, even the unanimous will of the rest of the country, the right to dispose in such a way of its fate and of the fate of future generations.¹⁸³

The argument is, of course, doubly fallacious since it conflates the situation of 1878 with the different context of 1812 and retrospectively applies the

¹⁷⁹ Stere, *Marele războiu și politica României*, 103. Emphasis in original—A. C.

¹⁸⁰ Stere, “Dreptul Basarabiei asupra României” [Bessarabia's right over Romania], in *Marele războiu și politica României*, 96–99.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

constitutional provisions of 1866 to a prior territorial settlement between two empires that in no way affected contemporary relations. There is, however, a certain consistency in Stere's argument, and this derives from his concept of the nation, which contains a number of ahistorical elements. Despite his tendency to link the national phenomenon to the state—indeed, at one point Stere called the Romanian Kingdom “the territory of national consolidation”—Stere's organic vision rebelled against the possibility of historical contingencies that might determine a voluntary compromise on territorial unity. Thus, he emphasizes that “one part of the nation, however significant, cannot sell or exchange another part of the nation, however small, regardless of the price. A nation can suffer violent amputations, but it cannot consent legally to its own vivisection for whatever advantages, which, in the case of such moral degradation, could only be imaginary.”¹⁸⁴

The image of a suffering body that should preserve its physical and moral integrity framed Stere's perspective on Bessarabia's belonging to Romania even in his most legalistic moments when he discussed the possibility of individual petitions for Romanian citizenship for Bessarabian inhabitants born as Romanian subjects or their descendants (mostly in the case of Southern Bessarabia).¹⁸⁵ Such arguments should be placed in the context of the contemporary polemics on the relative importance of “non-redeemed” territories in which Stere tried to overcome his position as a spokesman for the Bessarabian population. He proposed the model of the integral national ideal that in fact reflected both his pro-German convictions and Romania's complicated situation in the later phase of the war. However, he remained consistent with his earlier insistence on the centrality of the “Bessarabian question,” which was far from being just politically expedient. Stere's approach to the Russian Empire might have been less metaphysical and better informed socially and politically than that of his predecessors, but it was not fundamentally different. He was also rather critical of contemporary Romanian society, but his support for nation-building was unconditional. What he brought to the already established national narrative was his greater political awareness and experience as a failed revolutionary that ultimately determined his difficult integration into the Romanian political system, and, perhaps in a more acute form than in Hasdeu's or Moruzi's case, displayed the multiple challenges that a Bessarabian émigré encountered because of what I have termed “the uncertainty of identity.”

Each of the three authors examined here left an imprint on Romanian discourse about Bessarabia and the Russian Empire. The significance of their joint discussion despite their many ideological, generational, and cul-

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 99.

tural differences stems from the importance of the dynamics of the insider/outsider position that these individuals exemplified. Their ambiguous situation in the Romanian intellectual realm is not just a truism since it impacted their works and their understandings of Russianness and Romanianness. Bessarabia was of course the central thread connecting them (albeit less so in Hasdeu's case), but they are no less interesting in their own right as contributors to Romanian national discourse. The ways in which they exploited their own and their province's marginality in order to subvert or minimize it speaks volumes about the multifaceted and contested character of the Romanian national narrative itself. Their nationalism was certainly a peripheral one in all respects, but the intellectual dialogue they engaged in shows how transfers and borrowings were important for the articulation of a national project. No less important was the imperial dimension that these Bessarabian-born Romanian nationalists confronted and appropriated in ways that were often more creative than those of their intellectual descendants.

CHAPTER V

Revolution, War, and the “Bessarabian Question”: Russian and Romanian Perspectives (1905–16)

This chapter will explore the impact of the immediate prewar period and World War I on the symbolic imagination of Bessarabia in the Russian and Romanian public spheres. The narrative will follow a twofold, sequential structure. First, I will analyze the Bessarabian case in the context of the major policy shifts initiated by the Russian government and military authorities following the outbreak of hostilities in August 1914. In this period, the Bessarabian borderland became the object of an open territorial dispute with neighboring Romania. Due to the Romanian government's uncertain position during the initial phase of the conflict, Bessarabian authorities anticipated the possibility of a military clash and therefore paid increased attention to the potentially subversive tendencies of the local population. This applied not only to the German colonists of Southern Bessarabia, who were unequivocally included in the category of “enemy aliens” alongside other ethnic German communities in southern Russia (today's southern Ukraine), but also to Romanian-speaking peasants and intellectuals suspected of harboring pro-Romanian sentiments. Following the general trend of connecting ethnicity directly to state loyalty in the central bureaucracy and the imperial army, Bessarabian Romanians were perceived as a collectively suspect group for the first time. The imposition of nationalizing categories on subjects of the Russian Empire was neither smooth nor straightforward in the Bessarabian case. The local population was traditionally regarded as staunchly loyal to the Russian throne, and its closeness to the Great Russians was the result of its adherence to the Orthodox Church and its sharing in the economic benefits of the all-Russian market. The peasant masses also seemed to be willing recipients of and recruits for right-wing ideologies espoused by pro-monarchist and extremist organizations, including, for example, the Union of Russian People, which was quite successful in attracting peasant activists. In connection with the weakening of the traditional bases for dynastic legitimacy, a growing sense of uneasiness and apprehension gripped Russian authorities in Bessarabia. The invocation of

the threat of separatism, which was uttered only occasionally during the prewar years (for example, during the 1863–64 Polish Revolt),¹ now seemed imminent in a way that was hardly conceivable before. This was clear even before Romania's alignment with the Entente powers when Bessarabia was included in the zone administered directly by the Russian army. The province's exceptional status placed the Russian administration under strain, which was further complicated by the presence of other "enemy aliens" in the region—namely, Germans and Jews. Thus, Bessarabia became the object of a nationalizing policy that affected the practice of governing the imperial borderlands.

Second, World War I triggered an upsurge in interest in the "Bessarabian question" in the Romanian Kingdom. The region's marginality within Romanian national discourse was overcome on several levels. Bessarabia became a potential object of diplomatic bargaining, which naturally drew the attention of Romanian political elites to the region as potential compensation for Romania's alliance with the Central Powers. Furthermore, the polemics surrounding Romania's entry into the war produced several accounts about the importance of the "Bessarabian question" for Romania. This literature could be subdivided into three main categories: 1) policy analyses assessing the economic, strategic, and demographic importance of Bessarabia for the Romanian nation-state from a pragmatic standpoint; 2) political debates and parliamentary discourses that resonated widely due to their programmatic nature or to the prominent personalities involved (e.g., the printed versions of the speeches given by Constantin Stere,² Petre Carp,³ and Take Ionescu in late 1915 and early 1916 as the controversy over Romania's neutrality escalated); and 3) Romanian travelogues and

¹ In this sense, the report of the Bessarabian civil governor to Alexander II on July 6, 1863, is quite revealing. The official stated that Bessarabia, as a borderland region, found itself in an "extraordinary position" since it bordered Moldavia, inhabited by the "same nationality" (*edinoplemennot*), accounting for at least "half of the population." The governor warned Petersburg about the appearance of a "Romanophile" party, which consisted of certain young noblemen dreaming of "a united Romania" and attracted to the constitutional-representative government of the United Principalities. Writing in the context of the Great Reforms, the governor saw in the latter's success a guarantee of the eradication of "any dreams about a Moldavian nationality." The reforms will "force the Romanophiles to forget about the appealing ghost of Moldavian constitutionalism that lures them at present." However, the governor was careful to emphasize that this "young party" was "very insignificant" and did not represent any palpable threat to the Russian administration in the region. See ANRM, fond 2, op. 1, d. 7573, ll. 65–66 verso.

² Stere, *România și războiul european*; Stere, *Discursul D-lui Take Ionescu*; and Stere, *Marele războiu și politica României*.

³ Stere and Carp, *Politica externă a României*.

general accounts of Bessarabia's situation following the tradition initiated by Nicolae Iorga⁴ and continued by such figures as State Dragomir⁵ and Vasile D. Moisiu.⁶ The latter two cases are particularly revealing due to the absence of an open political agenda.

Another feature distinguishing the neutrality period in Romania was the intensification of the openly irredentist activities of the Cultural League and the appearance of specific organizations aiming to reclaim Bessarabian territory. Bessarabian-born émigrés provided most of the human and scholarly resources for such endeavors.⁷ However, this period also witnessed an open split between the Transylvanian and Bessarabian factions within the national-cultural movement. Epitomized by the staunchly pro-Entente Nicolae Iorga and the equally uncompromising Germanophile Constantin Stere, competition over the priorities of national expansion raged throughout the first half of the war. It was only stifled once Romania entered the conflagration in August 1916, and it briefly re-emerged in late 1917 and early 1918 following the tumultuous events in Russia and the collapse of the Romanian Front. This later phase will remain outside the present discussion, which will not address the impact of the Russian Revolution on events in Bessarabia and on the corresponding shifts in Romanian policy. The time frame of the chapter will thus span the two-year period between the beginning of World War I and Romania's engagement in military operations on August 14/27, 1916.

The final section will examine Bessarabian initiatives to place the area on the new geopolitical map that had to be redrawn in the aftermath of the war. The discussion will focus on a document recently published by a Romanian researcher that sheds new light on the self-awareness of the emerging local Bessarabian intellectual class during the war.⁸ This memorandum written by one of the most active participants in the fledgling Bessarabian Romanian national movement, Alexis Nour, is important not so much because of its content, which explicitly aims to provide a description of Russian domination in Bessarabia, but because of the context

⁴ Iorga, *Neamul românesc în Basarabia*.

⁵ State Dragomir, *Din Basarabia* [From Bessarabia] (Iași, 1908).

⁶ Moisiu, *Știri din Basarabia de astăzi*.

⁷ One of the people involved was the former anarchist Zamfir Arbore, who played a prominent role in the ranks of the "Bessarabian group" and contributed to anti-Russian polemics with his brochure *Liberarea Basarabiei* [Bessarabia's liberation], published in 1915. See also Axinte Frunză, *România Mare* [Greater Romania] (Bucharest: Tipografia F. Goebel Fii, 1915).

⁸ Teodor Pavel, *Între Rusia țarilor și Germania Wilhelmiană: Un memoriu basarabean din 1916* [Between Tsarist Russia and Wilhelmine Germany: An unpublished Bessarabian memorandum from 1916] (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 1996).

of its publication and the implications arising therefrom. It was part of a propaganda project secretly initiated by the German government through a number of intermediary civil society organizations that was meant to undermine Germany's imperial competitors, namely Russia. The intersection of local Bessarabian grievances and the international context led to one of the few explicit attempts to view the region within the larger structure of the Russian Empire. Though written in Romania (where Nour had to emigrate before the war), this work showed the potential that Romanian national discourse emanating from Bessarabia possessed and was an indicator of the possible beginnings of a national movement in Bessarabia that the events of 1917 accelerated and whose course they shaped.

Bessarabia as a Contested Borderland during Revolution and War (1905–15)

In order to understand the significant shifts in the changed symbolic status of Bessarabia within the Russian Empire by the outbreak of World War I, a more extended analysis of prewar developments is necessary. There was no indication of any active opposition to the Russian authorities in Bessarabia before the 1905–7 Revolution, despite the occasional resurgence of the theme of “political unreliability” and “Moldophile tendencies” in a number of official papers.⁹ Russian officials were rarely concerned about the loyalty of the overwhelming majority of the population, noting either the satisfactory situation of Bessarabia in this regard or commenting on the peasants' indifference toward anything beyond their narrow economic interests. The

⁹ As relevant examples, the following documents can be cited: 1) a report of the head of the Provincial Gendarmes to the Third Section of the Imperial Chancellery, dated July 21, 1875 (GARF, Police Department, Third Expedition, fond 109, 1875, d. 68, ll. 62 verso–63); 2) a secret report of the deputy head of the Bessarabian Gendarmerie to his superior, dated January 21, 1888, concerning the “suspect sympathies” of certain intellectual elements from Northern Bessarabia toward “neighboring countries: Austria, Romania, and Moldavia (?)” (GARF, Police Department, Third Expedition, fond 102, 1888, op. 84, d. 89, fascicle 50, l. 17–17 verso); and 3) a similar report (dated January 21, 1892) focusing on “anti-Russophile” leanings in small noble and intellectual circles in Central Bessarabia (ANRM, fond 297, op. 1, d. 15, ll. 1–3, 5–5 verso). These sources are also cited in Negru, *Țarismul și mișcarea națională a românilor din Basarabia*, 132–33, 139, and 143–44. However, the available data allow one to draw only very tentative conclusions regarding the possible existence of local opposition to Russian rule. In any case, such circles involved only a handful of individuals who never articulated any kind of national project.

region was not perceived as a vulnerable borderland in the way that the lands of the former Polish Commonwealth or even the Caucasus were. Although the existence of the Romanian Kingdom was a constant reminder of the potential for Romanian irredentism directed toward Bessarabia, the symbolic competition over the region occurred largely in intellectual circles or was left to Russian foreign espionage, which put suspicious Bessarabian immigrants under surveillance.

One of the most interesting documents attesting to the activity of Russian counterintelligence in Romania concerns the Society of Bessarabians supposedly founded in Bucharest in 1903. Apparently linked to the Tartu (Dorpat) organization of Bessarabian students, this society allegedly included the most notorious figures among the Bessarabian émigrés who fled to Romania: Hasdeu, Dr. Petre Cazacu, Gheorghe Madan, Zamfir Arbore-Rally, and Stere, as well as other important personalities such as Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea [Mihail Katz]. According to the report of a Russian liaison officer, V. V. Trzhetsiak, this society's ultimate goal was "the unification of Bessarabia with Romania and the future attainment of Bessarabia's autonomy under Romania's protection" (the apparent contradiction escaped the Russian agent's attention).¹⁰ The immediate goals of this organization included, among other objectives, the "spread throughout Bessarabia of Romanian patriotic publications." However, the existence of such an organization appears rather doubtful and seems to be an invention of Trzhetsiak, eager to prove himself before his superiors. The dubious nature of his report is also reinforced by his spurious claim that this community "existed as far back as the time of Bessarabia's integration into Russia." While correctly identifying some of the more prominent Bessarabian national activists in Romania, the agent clearly exaggerates the cohesion of this community.¹¹ Despite the often self-serving reports issued by Russian foreign agents, the pre-1905 period did not witness any significant instances of internal sedition that drew the attention of local authorities. The Romanian challenge remained latent and did not significantly affect the Russian government's policy toward Bessarabia. However, following the

¹⁰ Secret information sent by V. V. Trzhetsiak to the head of the Bessarabian Okhrana Office on May 31, 1903. ANRM, fond 215, op. 1, d. 4, ll. 37–37 verso, 40–40 verso. The agent also provides a list with biographical and occupational details of the émigrés (ANRM, fond 215, op. 1, d. 4, ll. 38–39 verso). Also cited in Negru, *Țarismul și mișcarea națională a românilor din Basarabia*, 146–50. My doubts regarding the existence of such an organization also stem from the absence of any data on its activities in contemporaneous Romanian publications. Trzhetsiak was apparently active throughout 1903, which attracted the attention of the Romanian authorities and press. See GARF, fond 505, op. 1, d. 70, l. 28 verso.

¹¹ Ibid.

revolutionary upheaval of 1905, Bessarabia suddenly emerged as a problematic borderland of the empire.

In late 1906 and early 1907, the local administration developed an image of Bessarabia that would prevail for the next decade and would structure the authorities' approach to the national problem in the *guberniia*. The most significant discursive shift was the use of the terms "separatism" and "irredentism" to account for the potentially troubling developments among the local intelligentsia. Here the revolutionary context in which imperial officials' concerns emerged should be kept in mind. From the extant sources, it is clear that the Russian administration had to contend with an unusual degree of mobilization by local intellectuals who could potentially develop an alternative vision for the province's future. At the time, this open challenge was only possible due to the weakening of the state apparatus throughout the empire. Accordingly, the Bessarabian governor, A. N. Haruzin, clearly saw the potential complications that could arise in the region if decisive steps to quell the fledgling movement were not taken immediately. Bessarabian officials were prompted into action by a demand issued in November 1906 from the Police Department requiring detailed information on the "Romanophile current that exists among the population" of Bessarabia.¹² The initial source of this heightened interest in Bessarabian affairs was the information collected by Russian counterintelligence officers in Romania concerning the intensification of "Romanian propaganda in favor of Bessarabia's autonomy."¹³ These inquiries prompted the Bessarabian governor to produce a detailed analysis of the political situation in Bessarabia during the revolutionary period.

Before discussing the document, several general features of his argument should be emphasized: 1) the neat distinction between the unquestionable loyalty of the majority and the pernicious activities of the small "Moldavian party" (thus, the opposition between the trustworthy "people" and the unreliable "elites" so characteristic for late imperial Russia was transferred to the Bessarabian context); 2) the identification of the intermediate stratum of the intelligentsia and its active involvement in revolutionary and nationalist movements in the borderlands (the direct link between revolutionary and national activists received special attention); 3) the

¹² Secret letter of the deputy director of the Police Department's Special Section to the Bessarabian Governor, November 11, 1906. GARF, Police Department, fond 102, 1906, op. 235, fascicle 1, d. 936, l. 9. Also cited in Negru, *Țarismul și mișcarea națională a românilor din Basarabia*, 153.

¹³ Ibid. See also a similar document issued two days later by the same institution, addressing the head of the Bessarabian Gendarmes. ANRM, fond 297, op. 1, d. 50, l. 187. Also cited in Negru, *Țarismul și mișcarea națională a românilor din Basarabia*, 153–54.

pragmatic policy of the authorities, who attempted to counter revolutionary propaganda by printing leaflets in Romanian and distributing them in rural areas, proving that officials reacted to local circumstances and used local idioms to outmaneuver their ideological opponents (in this sense, the theory that the Romanian language was deliberately suppressed in Bessarabia should be re-evaluated); and 4) the importance of the local context in comparison to other regions of the Western Borderlands.

What, then, were the actual contents of the "Bessarabian question" as envisaged by the highest-ranking imperial official in the region? First, Haruzin asserts that "the broad masses of the local Moldavian population are completely unaffected by "pro-Romanian tendencies" and "do not deserve any reproach concerning their lack of loyalty to the Throne and the Russian State."¹⁴ In addition to this general thesis, the governor provides several explanations for the unwavering loyalty of the Moldavians that could be grouped into three sets of factors: 1) Russia's position in the Romanian Principalities as a "protector," and, thus, "the inclusion of the current territory of the Bessarabian gubernia into Russia did not have the character of a conquest, inimical toward the local population, but that of inclusion into [*prisoedineniia*] a friendly power";¹⁵ 2) the common Eastern Orthodox Church, which "strengthened the unity [*edinenie*] and mutual understanding between the Moldavians" and the Russians settled in Bessarabia;¹⁶ and 3) the absence of any "antagonism between the Russians and the Moldavians" in the social sphere due to the "benevolent attitude of the supreme Government and the local authorities toward the Moldavians," who were not regarded as "aliens [*inorodtsev*] that were foreign to Russia's interests."¹⁷ As a result, the governor concludes that the Moldavians' identity was shaped by their closeness to and shared interests with the Russians: "Quite often, a local Moldavian, while not renouncing his own ethnicity [*narodnosti*], thinks of himself as a Russian or designates himself with the blurry and imprecise term 'Bessarabian' [*bessarabets*]."¹⁸ The Bessarabian official also linked the absence of "any signs of irredentism among the broad masses of the Moldavian population" to the economic benefits guaranteed by the all-Russian market and to the widespread perception of the Romanian peasantry's relative poverty and exploitation in comparison with

¹⁴ Strictly confidential letter of the Bessarabian governor A. N. Haruzin to the director of the Police Department M. I. Trusevich, January 15, 1907. GARF, Police Department, Special Section, Fond 102, 1906, op. 235, fascicle 1, d. 936, ff. 11–15, here l. 11. Also cited in Negru, *Țarismul și mișcarea națională a românilor din Basarabia*, 154–58.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., l. 12.

Bessarabian peasants.¹⁹ The economic argument played a leading role in the rhetorical arsenal of the Russian authorities. Romanian observers also routinely noted that it was one of the main reasons why the Romanian Kingdom remained unattractive. Nevertheless, the economic factor had an obverse side aptly summarized by Haruzin. Growing discontent was developing among Bessarabian “Moldavian” landowners who were unable to compete with the Greek and Armenian landlords actively buying estates in Bessarabia and successfully adapting to the challenges of intensive agricultural production. This situation generated national-economic conflicts that did not affect the legitimacy of the Russian government as such, but could prove potentially troubling for the authorities.²⁰

Second, the governor cast doubt on the political reliability of the local nobility. Certain members of the “first estate” were active in a particular “Moldavian party,” whose existence could be explained through the ties of acquaintance, mutual interests, and blood that connected them to “members of Romania’s upper classes.”²¹ Despite the fact that this group “frequently manifested a certain flexibility regarding questions of a nationalist nature [*svoistva*],”²² Haruzin was careful to qualify the danger of such occasional manifestations by emphasizing the Bessarabian nobility’s gradual integration into the Russian *dvorianstvo*. This integration was facilitated by family relations, nobles’ common educational background in Russian institutions, and their bureaucratic assignments to central Russian provinces that gradually “leveled the differences between persons of Russian and Moldavian descent.”²³ This benign image of the nobility stood in stark contrast to the more immediate challenge to the imperial state posed by the “third element” of local society—the emerging intelligentsia. Bessarabian officials were aware that the fusion of revolutionary slogans and nationalist mobilization could become a serious threat in the borderlands. Indeed, Haruzin speaks of “a general inclination toward separatism in the borderlands” that facilitated the emergence of the dreaded “national-revolutionary” nexus in Bessarabia.²⁴ In this context, the authorities’ proposed countermeasures were especially significant. Far from relying solely on repressive measures, the local administration displayed remarkable flexibility and pragmatism in tackling the issue of subversive propaganda. As suggested above, they launched a concerted campaign of alternative propaganda consisting of three interrelated elements.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., l. 13.

The first element was the printing and distribution of pro-monarchist proclamations in Bessarabian villages. Apparently, this move succeeded in overwhelming the revolutionary printing industry by sheer numbers alone.²⁵ The second element was the publication of an alternative press organ to outweigh the impact of the *Basarabia* newspaper, which was the main press outlet of the fledgling opposition movement that received generous editorial and financial support from public figures in Romania, such as Constantin Stere and Zamfir C. Arbore, and indirectly from the Romanian government. The idea of printing an alternative newspaper that would be financed secretly by the Ministry of the Interior was soon realized through the publication of *Moldovanul* [The Moldavian]. This ostensibly private and moderately pro-monarchist editorial enterprise was led by Gheorghe Madan, one of the most interesting and controversial early twentieth-century Bessarabian intellectuals.²⁶ The authorities attempted to dissociate themselves from the publication, fearing that any hint of official patronage might jeopardize its impact on its target audience. The final counterweight to irredentist propaganda was provided by the activities of the Union of the Russian People. If one is to believe Haruzin, its progress in Bessarabia was quite significant at this time. His explanation is quite revealing: "The success . . . that this Union enjoys in Bessarabia should not be explained by the presence in this gubernia of numerous elements of people of Russian ethnicity [*narodnosti*]. [Rather, it derives from] the idea 'For the Fatherland, For the Tsar, For Loyalty to the Throne,' which is easily understood by the Moldavian peasants and which received a lively response from the Moldavians, to whom Romanophile ideas are alien."²⁷

The governor's report marked a shift in Russian policy on at least two fundamental levels. First, it outlined a clear and coordinated strategy aimed at blocking the potential irredentist threat. The fact that such a detailed

²⁵ Governor Haruzin reported the following: "I issued in the same ['Moldavian'] language appeals and addresses to the people . . . in such significant numbers (I issued over one million copies for the whole *guberniia*) that they dominated in the countryside," *ibid.*

²⁶ Gheorghe Madan (1872–1944) was a prominent member of the Bessarabian émigré community in Romania in the early twentieth century who worked as an actor in Iași. After 1905, he returned to Bessarabia to serve the Russian government as a censor of Romanian-language publications and a secret agent in Romania. Madan's exact role in the pre-World War I period is hard to ascertain (he might have been a double agent). The reports he sent to the Russian Office of Gendarmes in Bessarabia in 1909 will be discussed in the following section. *Ibid.*, l. 14. The *Moldovanul* newspaper was published intermittently between January 1907 and October 1908.

²⁷ GARF, Police Department, Special Section, Fond 102, 1906, op. 235, fascicle 1, d. 936, l. 14.

strategy never existed before suggests a change of attitude within the Russian bureaucracy toward the “Bessarabian question.” However, this shift attested more to the mindset of Russian officials than to any accurate estimate of the actual intensity of nationalist mobilization in the province, which remained rather low. Second, the manipulation of traditional and dynastic themes of loyalty to the state acquired an intentional and instrumental character, which, despite their ostensible success, signaled their perceived vulnerability. Both of these factors framed Russian policy toward and discourse on Bessarabia in the decade leading up to the collapse of the imperial regime. In his summary, Haruzin reiterated that Romanophilia was alien to the majority of the population and that revolutionary circles in league with Romanian nationalists were working in a “separatist and irredentist direction.” To thwart these machinations, “unfailing attention and constant, but rational counteractions” were needed.²⁸ In case this pragmatic and rational approach failed, the governor warned that, “without a doubt, in the near future a rather serious borderland question will arise in Bessarabia.”²⁹ Thus, Russian officials increasingly viewed Bessarabia as a threatened borderland. The Russian Empire started to take seriously the impact of nationalism in the borderlands, even in cases where its position previously seemed secure, while potential contenders were either weak or simply ignored.

Even after the revolutionary tide waned and local politics became less radical, local authorities were careful to follow and control the channels and figures involved in the irredentist movement. Increasingly aware of the regional implications of the “Romanian question” and the importance of reliable information concerning political tendencies within the Romanian Kingdom, Governor A. N. Haruzin resorted to the services of Gheorghe Madan, who had proven his effectiveness as the editor of the *Moldovanul* newspaper. Madan became a censor of Romanian-language publications in October 1908, but his duties in fact included a wide range of activities that transformed him into a central source of information for the Bessarabian administration. While informing Madan about his new appointment, the governor attached a set of detailed instructions that revealed the shifting perception of the “Bessarabian question.”³⁰ Aside from his usual censorship duties entailing close surveillance of all incoming Romanian-language publications, Madan was also asked to do the following tasks: 1) to pay special

²⁸ Ibid., I. 15.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Strictly confidential instruction of the Bessarabian governor to the correspondent of the St. Petersburg Telegraph Agency G. V. Madan, issued on October 2, 1908. ANRM, fond 2, op. 1, d. 9263, I. 16–16 verso. Also cited in Negru, *Țarismul și mișcarea națională a românilor din Basarabia*, 173–74.

attention to the "anti-Russian tendency" in publications with the aim of "elaborating a definite and exact system of combating the pro-Romanian irredentist current" both in Bessarabia and in Romania proper; 2) to be "constantly and thoroughly informed about Romanian political movements" and to be familiar with the activities of the most prominent leaders of Romanian nationalist organizations focused either on Bessarabia or on Transylvania and Bukovina; 3) to study the measures undertaken by the Hungarian and Austrian governments to counter "Romanian propaganda"; 4) to gather information regarding Romanian-language books and newspapers sold in Transylvania; 5) to assemble data on the individuals who receive such publications and to determine whether there is a market for this literature in Bessarabia; 6) to investigate which social strata and political associations are particularly prone to pro-Romanian leanings, displaying "an interest for Romania and everything Romanian, an infatuation with the idea of 'Greater Romania,' or an infatuation with 'Romanian culture'";³¹ and 7) finally, to assess whether "over the past decades pro-Romanian attitudes increased or faded away within Bessarabia's borders; whether the process of the local population's assimilation into the Empire has been strengthened or not; and, in case the data in this respect prove to be negative, to clarify the cultural-historical causes of this phenomenon."³² All of this amounted to a comprehensive agenda of stemming the nationalization of the Bessarabian masses by closely surveilling potential national activists and blocking the channels of written propaganda, as well as studying the experience of neighboring empires. This last point is significant due to the inter-imperial dimension of the "Romanian question." Inter-imperial collaboration and the borrowing of techniques, theoretical frameworks, and presumably even legislation on the nationality question not only reveals the interdependence of the imperial players in this part of Eurasia, but also points to the potential for mutual subversion that was later activated during World War I.

This ambitious program of countering the internal nationalist challenge in Bessarabia reflected not so much the actual dimensions of the perceived threat to Russian authority in the region as it did the debate on the shifting strategies of imperial governance. Before 1905, the administration pursued a policy of ignoring local elites' feeble attempts to articulate linguistic and cultural grievances, but their possible alliance with revolutionary elements later prompted the government to act. Another factor might have been the interaction of young Bessarabian students with activists involved in the Polish and Ukrainian national movements who were rather active in the university centers most accessible to Bessarabians: Iur'ev (Dorpat) and

³¹ Quotation marks in original. See ANRM, fond 2, op. 1, d. 9263, l. 16 verso.

³² *Ibid.*, l. 16–16 verso.

Kiev. In any case, the authorities were now aware of the need to obtain the support of the rural masses for the imperial project before they could be drawn into the nationalizing sphere of pro-Romanian intellectuals.

The sketchy outline of such a strategy can be found in several policy papers that Gheorghe Madan wrote in 1909 while serving as an agent for the local Gendarmes' Office.³³ The most original part of his policy recommendations is his alternative method for Russifying Bessarabia. His approach contains an inherent contradiction in that it asserts the Moldavian population's staunch loyalty to the state, while highlighting the ostensible failure of the authorities to assimilate the local population into Russian culture. This contradiction refers not to the *ends* of Russian policy in Bessarabia, but solely to the ineffective *means* hitherto employed by state officials. In fact, Madan's proposal bears a striking resemblance to Il'minskii's strategy of Christianization among non-Tatar ethnic groups in the Volga region through the use of local languages. Although Il'minskii's methods had come under greater scrutiny, Madan argued that the consolidation of Russian patriotism was only possible through concerted propaganda efforts in Romanian. He thus favored a cultural and "state-patriotic" version of Russification instead of the linguistic Russification that was ultimately unsuccessful. Moreover, he explained the partial success of "pan-Romanian" propaganda by pointing to the extensive use of the local Romanian dialect in appeals to its potential target audience in rural areas.

In fact, Madan noted the failure of the Russian-language educational system in Bessarabia to inculcate even the rudiments of a Russian state consciousness among the peasants of the region. This was due to the numerous flaws in its organization and to the rather superficial character of the education provided mostly by parish schools that left the Bessarabian rural population overwhelmingly illiterate. Madan emphasized the paradox in the early twentieth century by asking a rhetorical question highlighting the absurdity of the contemporary situation. "Who could have thought," Madan asked, "that the Bessarabian Moldavians, attached to Russia almost one hundred years ago when there was no Romanian national culture, no national consciousness, no national pride, that these Moldavians, having during this time increased their numbers till they reached 1.5 million, living

³³ Though his name is not explicitly mentioned in the recruiting report sent by the head of the Bessarabian Gendarmes, Colonel Sokolov, to the Police Department in late September 1909, several clues as to the agent's identity are present. First, he is identified as a "former editor of a Romanian-[language] newspaper, a Russian subject." Second, his task is defined as "reporting on the propaganda of Romanian nationalist ideas in Bessarabia." Both of these allusions point to Madan. See ANRM, fond 297, op. 1, d. 98, ll. 130–31 verso. See also ANRM, fond 297, op. 1, d. 98, l. 179. Also cited in Negru, *Țarismul și mișcarea națională a românilor din Basarabia*, 161–67.

together with various Slavic elements and remaining for so long under Russian domination, would not have assimilated, would not have Russified [*obruseli*], but would have 'Moldavianized' [*omoldovanili*] and continue to 'Moldavianize' the Slavic elements . . . in Bessarabia [?]"³⁴

The underlying significance of this passage lies in the explicit reference to the non-participation of the Bessarabian Romanians in the nation-building process underway in the Romanian Principalities from the 1820s onward.³⁵ Despite this pessimistic outlook (contrary to the triumphalist view of imperial officials on festive occasions such as the 1912 anniversary), the Russian agent reflects that "if one would study the people's soul [*narodnuiu dushu*] until the end of the last [nineteenth] century, then one would see that the Moldavians espouse the most complete and sincere love and loyalty toward the Sovereign Emperor, the most profound pious awe toward Great, Holy Russia and ardently desire to learn [to be] Russian, to become completely Russian."³⁶ In a similar passage, Madan reinforces his point by asserting that "the Bessarabian Moldavians, though not speaking the Russian language, consider themselves [*shchitaiut sebia*] as Russians, desire to learn Russian, and to be closely acquainted with Russian culture."³⁷ The author implicitly blames the government for missing the opportunity to exploit this favorable attitude before the advent of mass politics and the appearance of local reform movements deprived Russian authorities of any initiative. It was the government's inefficiency and indecisive policies that prevented "organic Russification" from taking root, despite the promising initial conditions. Madan still found some cause for optimism, however, when describing his proposed strategy to overcome this predicament:

At present, there is no serious organization pursuing a serious pan-Romanian agenda; there are only a handful of individuals, but the field for this kind of agitation is quite wide in Bessarabia. This field has already been plowed and partially sown with the seeds of Romanianism. It has to be plowed all over again and sown with the seeds of Russianism [*russizmom*], and it has to be done in clear and familiar words [in Romanian]. More importance should be given to the propagation of Russian Statehood, Russian culture, and Russian patriotism than to the forcible imposition of the Russian language. Until the Moldavians have been thoroughly Russified [*obruseliut*], love for Russia and unity with the Russian people can also be preached in Moldavian.³⁸

³⁴ Ibid., l. 181.

³⁵ The author further develops this point when speaking about the fundamental differences between Bessarabia, Transylvania, and Bukovina.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., l. 181 verso.

³⁸ Ibid., l. 182.

In another report issued in the same period, Madan, while concluding that “the progress of assimilation is immensely [*strashno*] weakened in Bessarabia,” insists that “when the severed Russian historical life is re-established, when the Ministry for Public Instruction creates a rich popular patriotic Russian literature, it has to be immediately propagated among the Moldavians, without waiting until they learn the Russian language.”³⁹ As in Haruzin’s case, the Bessarabian-born Madan was aware of the importance of the local idiom for mobilizing the passive Bessarabian rural population. This population was still perceived as a malleable object of rival political projects. Madan realized the importance of an effective strategy for mass political mobilization. He was more pessimistic regarding the government’s previous achievements and attempted to adapt imperial political practices to the competitive atmosphere of the age of nationalism.

A second aspect of Madan’s arguments concerned the historical conditions that distinguished Bessarabia’s evolution from that of the Romanian Principalities and the contemporary threat of Romanian nationalism, which was far from abstract in his view. Emphasizing the benevolent attitude of the Moldavians and Wallachians toward the Russian Empire, which gradually began to change after 1848, Madan was also careful to distinguish between the strength of the national movement in the Principalities and the Romanian-inhabited provinces of Austria-Hungary and its almost complete absence in Bessarabia. Again, the province was defined in terms of the absence of nationalizing elements that might have opposed Russian rule. Madan’s perspective was rather unique for this period, though its relevance was enhanced by his position as an insider within the Bessarabian community in Romania. This opposition is clear in the following passage: “Such historical events as the tumultuous awakening of national consciousness among the Romanians from the Moldavian and Wallachian Principalities during 1848, accompanied by the flourishing of national literature and by the unification of the Principalities [in 1859], did not elicit any reaction from the Bessarabian Moldavians, with the exception of a handful of intellectuals and priests. On the contrary, in the case of the Transylvanian and Bukovinian Romanians one witnessed unanimous national enthusiasm.”⁴⁰ This situation changed dramatically once the revolutionary movement within the Russian Empire became sensitive to national grievances and forged alliances with nationalist intellectuals. In Madan’s words, “Bessarabia and Romania became a revolutionary, anti-Russian camp.”⁴¹

³⁹ Ibid., l. 183 verso.

⁴⁰ ANRM, fond 297, op. 1, d. 98, l. 181 verso. Also cited in Negru, *Țarismul și mișcarea națională a românilor din Basarabia*, 163–67.

⁴¹ Ibid., l. 182.

The existence of the Romanian nation-state was potentially dangerous for the Russian authorities in Bessarabia not merely because of the direct influence of Romanian intellectuals and the government, but also due to specific internal features of Bessarabian society, including the salience of the Romanian language. Madan thus comments: "If the revolutionary national idea of pan-Romanianism began to successfully penetrate these [peasant] masses, it is because over the last several years these [activists] were the only ones . . . who preached to them in a language that these masses understood. This propaganda was conducted both orally and in print. The Romanian language is more widespread in Bessarabia than Russian."⁴² In keeping with his earlier proposal for alternative Russification, Madan advocates the increased participation of Bessarabian-born officials in measures promoting Russian culture in rural areas: "The Moldavians employed in state service should be required to contribute fruitfully to the Russification of the masses since they are the closest to the people and enjoy their special confidence."⁴³ This, of course, raises the question of the loyalty of local state officials that cannot be answered here. This task was made more difficult by the lack of a representative Slavic population in Bessarabia that could have served as the most ideal agent of Russification. Somewhat unexpectedly, Madan asserts that "there is no Great Russian element in Bessarabia. Slavdom is represented by the Poles, whom the Moldavians regard with a historically developed and intense religious dislike."⁴⁴

The image of the Romanian Kingdom that Madan presents is framed in terms of the direct competition for the loyalty of the empire's Bessarabian subjects. Accordingly, the Romanian state's irredentist potential is somewhat exaggerated on several levels. First, Madan warns of the strong nationalizing capabilities of the Romanian administration in comparison to its Russian counterpart. For this purpose, he uses the example of Dobrogea as a case of successful nation-building: "Thirty years ago, Dobrogea, inhabited by non-Romanians, was attached to Romania. Now, thirty years later, Dobrogea's entire population speaks Romanian, whereas in Bessarabia a

⁴² *Ibid.*, I. 183.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, I. 182 verso.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* This assertion is doubly misleading. First, Madan somehow neglects the "Little Russian" population, which was quite significant in numerical terms and certainly represented an important Slavic element in the province. His remarks probably refer to the visibility of various ethnic communities within elite groups, and his omission of the "Little Russians" is tied to their questionable loyalty in the eyes of imperial officials. Second, the "ardent dislike" for the Poles was more characteristic for government officials than for Moldavians. Such phrases are clearly intended for his superiors.

Russian needs a translator at every step.”⁴⁵ Second, Madan repeatedly stresses Bessarabia’s vulnerability to Romanian national and cultural propaganda. The idea of Romania as a potential Piedmont for Bessarabia surfaces in both reports he sent to the Gendarmes’ Office. Thus, he depicts the Romanian Kingdom in surprisingly positive terms as a full-fledged alternative to the Russian imperial regime: “An independent, well-organized (*blagoustroennoe*) Romanian Kingdom flourishes near Bessarabia’s borders; its influence upon the Bessarabians will be increasingly felt in the future. Besides, in itself, this tribe [*plemia*] is rather numerous, reaching a total of ten million people, and occupies a surface greater than Italy’s. In Romania there is a powerful party that pushes for active propaganda in Bessarabia.”⁴⁶ This challenge appeared far more threatening given the author’s obsession with competition in the cultural sphere that the Russian authorities were arguably already losing. Using an alarmist and urgent tone, Madan portrays Romania’s “quiet” cultural expansion, which undermined the integration of Bessarabians into the Russian Empire, in the following way: “Though Romania’s political borders end on the Prut, the borders of its cultural influence extend to the Dniester. A song . . . that is sung in Bucharest today can already be heard, in a month or two, in Bessarabia’s villages. Both in rural and urban areas a powerful movement toward one’s [ethnic] kinsmen can be observed. Among a part of the intelligentsia a passion for Romanian culture and even for revolutionary nationalism is discernible.”⁴⁷

This account clearly intended to alarm the local authorities rather than describe actual developments in the province. Madan failed to distinguish between the peak of national activism during 1905–6 and the situation prevailing three years later. However, this text illustrates how imperial officials were ready to accept such an alarmist version of events and how they gradually shifted from a neutral stance regarding their Bessarabian subjects’ loyalty to a competitive logic based on the perceived threat of Romanian irredentism. Madan also perpetuated this interpretation with a twofold strategy of argumentation. On the one hand, he identified the opponents of the regime as young Bessarabians studying mostly in Iași—an “energetic and pugnacious element” that along with the Romanian establishment supposedly hatched a “revolutionary nationalist” plot in Bessarabia—and Madan feared the emergence of “a national patriotic culture”⁴⁸ there. On the other hand, he warned

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., I. 183.

⁴⁸ Ibid. Madan was overstating his case. In fact, the nexus between revolution and nationalism was a constant source of uneasiness for the Romanian government. The attitude of the Kingdom’s governing circles toward radical Bessarabian nationalists was ambivalent, as became clear during the events of 1917–18.

against the growing anti-Russian sentiment in Romania, which was visible not only in Romania's alignment with the Triple Alliance of the Central Powers, but also in "all the historical publications, a part of the literary productions, and certain newspapers" that were characterized by a "scandalous anti-Russian orientation."⁴⁹ Bessarabia thus emerged as a problematic area on the empire's southwestern periphery threatened by a rival nation-state. The confusion regarding the best strategy to integrate the local peasant population into the Russian Empire led to the articulation of original solutions, of which Madan's proposal is a fascinating example.

The final part of Madan's argument concerned the Habsburg model of contending with the Romanian national movement. In addition to mentioning the special "nationalities department," which studied and monitored the evolution of national organizations (a model Madan suggested that the Russian Empire adopt), he also praised the creation of alternative Romanian-language publications that would undermine the nationalist movement from within. In the Hungarian case, these newspapers fought against "separatism" and "promoted the ideas of Magyar culture and statehood, of fraternity and unity with the Hungarians," which proved to be "hugely deleterious to pan-Romanian propaganda."⁵⁰ The implicit conclusion was that such a strategy might be even more successful in Bessarabia considering the much weaker nationalization of the masses and the reduced intensity of national activism. Moreover, Madan himself had practical experience in directing just such a publication several years earlier. The mutual borrowing of administrative methods from neighboring empires thus applied to the Bessarabian case as well.

Russian imperial authorities' preoccupation with the Romanophile movement in Bessarabia persisted until World War I. However, it did not lead to other policy proposals comparable to the one written by Madan. Russian officials were content to limit their countermeasures to the close surveillance of a few Bessarabian "national activists"⁵¹ and the suppression of attempts to publish uncensored and moderate opposition newspapers.⁵²

⁴⁹ Ibid., l. 183 verso.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ For example, see the report of the head of the Bessarabian Gendarmes, Colonel Sokolov, to the Police Department, dated December 31, 1909, in which it is clear that besides the activities of certain local intellectuals, the most troublesome element from the center's point of view was the local clergy, which demanded the introduction of standardized Romanian-language services in churches and benefited from its own press organ. See ANRM, fond 297, op. 1, d. 108, ll. 396–396 verso. Also cited in Negru, *Țarismul și mișcarea națională a românilor din Basarabia*, 168–69.

⁵² Censorship proved effective in blocking the appearance and distribution of such materials. Thus, during the tense period of the 1912 anniversary, the authorities

Despite the heightened tensions that erupted during the 1912 ceremonies, the overall consensus before the war was that the specter of separatism was a remote and unlikely possibility. This did not mean that local bureaucrats were not aware that the cultural grievances voiced by local intellectuals could become potentially destabilizing. In early 1914, the head of the Bessarabian Gendarmes noted that “recently, among a certain part of the Bessarabian intelligentsia, a tendency toward national ‘self-determination’ and ‘cultural work’ among the Moldavian population of Bessarabia emerged.”⁵³ The authorities were more worried, however, about the central role of the Romanian Kingdom as a potential nationalizing center than about developments in Bessarabia itself.

A comprehensive report filed by a Russian counterintelligence officer with a Bessarabian background and sent to the head of the Police Department from Constantinople on February 19, 1914, expressed such a concern.⁵⁴ This report focused, first, on the activities of the Romanian Cultural League in Bessarabia and elsewhere, and, second, provided a general analysis of political tendencies in Bessarabia. The author adopted a reserved and neutral stance that allowed for a more balanced assessment of the challenges the Russian Empire faced in the region. He correctly identified the fundamental difference between the earlier disparate “nationalist circles” and the coordinated and wide-ranging agenda of the Cultural League, which attempted to extend its influence in both the Russian and Habsburg lands inhabited by ethnic Romanians. The agent also noted the direct involvement of Romanian intellectuals and the political establishment in the League’s activities, emphasizing that the actual scope of its goals went far beyond strictly cultural matters. In fact, as he argues in the report, the League aimed at “sustaining the feelings of national self-consciousness and unity among the Romanians living outside Romania.”⁵⁵

The author also pointed to the difference between the Bessarabian and Transylvanian contexts. While in the latter case the Hungarian government

forbade the continued publication of a newspaper that featured “highly condemnable” comments on the anniversary and its significance. In the governor’s opinion, this newspaper aimed “to inculcate mistrust among the Moldavian part of the gubernia’s population toward the government and to undermine the Moldavians’ loyalty . . . toward the Throne and Fatherland.” ANRM, fond 2, op. 1, d. 9263, ll. 4–5, 10–10 verso. Also cited in Negru, *Țarismul și mișcarea națională a românilor din Basarabia*, 171–73.

⁵³ GARF, fond 102, op. D.P., Special Section, 1914, d. 300, l. 24. Quotation marks in original. Also cited in Negru, *Țarismul și mișcarea națională a românilor din Basarabia*, 184–85.

⁵⁴ GARF, fond 529, op. 1, d. 26, ll. 9–11. Secret Report Nr. 39, February 19, 1914 (mistakenly dated 1913).

⁵⁵ GARF, fond 529, op. 1, d. 26, l. 9.

had to pursue an alternating policy of repression and concessions due to the intensity of nationalist political mobilization, the efforts directed at mobilizing the Bessarabian masses during 1905–6 had largely failed.⁵⁶ Accordingly, the report concluded that there were no signs of separatism in Bessarabia since the revolutionary wave subsided in 1906–7, despite the upsurge in interest in Bessarabia among Romanian nationalist intellectuals during the 1912 anniversary. Even the Cultural League had to admit the poor conditions for full-fledged national propaganda in Bessarabia, which again differentiated this region from Transylvania and even Macedonia, where a more coherent program could be envisaged: "Concerning the Bessarabian *guberniia*, it has been decided [during the League's recent meetings] that at present, given the low degree of development of the rural class and considering the firm governmental regime in Russia, nothing can be effectively achieved, with the exception of providing the local population with [Romanian] books for reading."⁵⁷ The Romanian challenge was thus relegated to the distant future where it would be contingent upon the weakening of Russia's political institutions.

The second part of the report focused more specifically on the situation in Bessarabia. The resulting picture proved more complex than the author intended. Here one encounters the same optimism regarding the state's capability to subdue anti-regime manifestations and maintain the loyalty of the peasantry, coupled with pessimism regarding the true motivations of the educated class:

As a person who knows Bessarabia in all respects and has connections to all strata, without exception, I know for certain that although the rural population, the majority of the clergy, and most teachers in lower schools deeply prefer everything that is Romanian compared to everything Russian [*v dushe predpochitaiut russkomu vse rumynskoe*], there are no signs of separatism. Nationalism is expressed by conversations in the Moldavian language, which always existed, by reading Romanian books (seldom, for now) and singing Romanian national songs of a non-revolutionary character. The aforementioned elements of the population do not go beyond this line and are loyal subjects. The intelligentsia and especially the landowners, though occasionally speaking Moldavian at home, undoubtedly prefer their current status as Russian subjects due to the

⁵⁶ Ibid., I. 9–10. The program of the fledgling Bessarabian opposition movement included, among other demands, the following points: 1) the introduction of Romanian-language church services; 2) the teaching of Romanian in local schools; 3) the compulsory knowledge of Romanian for state officials; and 4) the publication of Romanian-language newspapers. As in previous analyses, the author associated the emergence of this movement with the activities of the local clergy and village priests (supported by "Romanian agitators").

⁵⁷ Ibid., I. 10.

protection of the Russian government and are the most loyal [group] to the Throne and to Russia in the whole Empire, which they have proven repeatedly. There are also some Romanophiles among the latter, but their number is quite insignificant.⁵⁸

Russian authorities' concerns in the immediate pre-World War I period were linked primarily to the potential threat of mainstream pan-Romanian nationalism, epitomized by the short-lived press campaigns of the *Basarabia* circle during 1906–7 and the moderate and tolerated Romanian-language publications *Moldovanul* and *Cuvânt Moldovenesc*. However, besides the mainstream version of Romanian national discourse that fully crystallized in 1917, alternative visions of local identity were articulated in the region during the post-1905 period. The initial phase of the mobilization of ethnicity allowed some Bessarabian nationalists to distance themselves from the Romanian model. This group emphasized the specificity of the Bessarabian regional context and was not attracted by developments within the Romanian Kingdom, which they viewed with suspicion. Among the most prominent members of this camp were the poet, writer, and publicist Alexei Mateevici and his colleague Gheorghe Stîrcea. These young intellectuals were relatively close to local church circles and could be conventionally labeled as “regionalists.” They pleaded for the preservation of traditional values and were reluctant to completely accept Romanian national discourse due to its association with modernity.⁵⁹ However, there was no major distinction between the mainstream pan-Romanian nationalists and the regionalists in post-1905 Bessarabia. The regionalists did not advance a separate Moldavian nationalism and did not oppose the future realization of the pan-Romanian national vision. The fluid character of national self-identification was perhaps best exemplified by the terminological confusion surrounding the designation of Bessarabia's Romanian-speaking population. At least three interchangeable terms were employed (Romanians, Moldavians, and Bessarabians), and their appearance on the pages of the nationalist press was rare. In the early twentieth century, there was no “Moldovanist” discourse in the modern sense of the word postulating a separate Moldovan identity. In fact, despite the central authorities' fears, the nationalist message had little impact until 1917. Although the regionalist agenda might have struck a chord with the Bessarabian peasantry, it did not do so in 1905–7, and it only partially succeeded in 1917. The peasantry was a very difficult target for nationalist agitators and remained unmoved by the external discourses competing for its allegiance.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, I. 11.

⁵⁹ A more extensive discussion of the regionalist variation of Bessarabian nationalism can be found in Cusco, Taki, and Grom, *Bessarabiia v sostave Rossiiskoi Imperii*, 286–88.

However, an obscure first attempt at articulating a "Moldovanist" agenda was undertaken by the newly appointed Bishop Serafim Chichagov (1908–14) in the immediate prewar years. Although a member of the clergy, Chichagov was heavily involved in politics and was close to the right-wing populist organization known as the Union of the Russian People. He pursued his political agenda with renewed vigor following his appointment to Bessarabia, which his superiors perceived as a problematic eparchy. This was due to the growing perception of a potential threat associated with the fledgling national movement and to the dynamics within the local church, whose clergy became increasingly assertive. The new bishop's mission was to address both issues. Besides reimposing central control following the relatively liberal policies of his predecessor, Bishop Vladimir (1904–1908), he also advocated certain innovative strategies in the cultural sphere.

In order to combat the purported separatist threat, he encouraged the development of a separate "Moldovan" language, seeking to insulate it from any form of Romanian influence.⁶⁰ The bishop claimed to support the "pure Moldovan language" used in church services, which was not tainted by influences from beyond the Prut. Of course, this did not result in an alternative nation-building project akin to the one pursued by Soviet authorities in the 1920s and 1930s in the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. Serafim lacked both the resources and the expertise to attain that goal. However, he was the first to articulate the idea of the fundamental difference and even antagonism between Moldovan and Romanian linguistic identity, most likely inspired by the debates in Bessarabian church publications and by some of the regionalists' writings. The differences the regionalists identified between standard Romanian and the Bessarabian dialect were not politically relevant and stemmed from their ethnophilia and their attempt to speak directly to the peasant masses. In contrast, Bishop Chichagov, who became the leader of a local branch of the Union of the Russian People, emphasized the political implications of his peculiar version of "Moldovanism," especially after Pavel Krushevan's death in 1909. He was careful to dissociate the "loyal and monarch-loving" ordinary folk from the local clergy and intellectuals who attempted to inculcate the masses with the foreign-inspired, pan-Romanian vision of their identity. In the bishop's view, this brand of separatism exerted some influence on Bessarabian society, but there were no traces of a "people's separatism."⁶¹ This project was unprecedented in Bessarabia under Russian rule and seems to have been a combination of signals from the center seeking to

⁶⁰ Ibid., 329–31.

⁶¹ Cazacu, *Moldova dintre Prut și Nistru, 1812–1918*, 181. Cited in Cusco, Taki, and Grom, *Bessarabiia v sostave Rossiiskoi Imperii*, 331.

combat the perceived threat of Romanian irredentism and Serafim's creative and peculiar interpretation of local debates. In this context, Bishop Chichagov can indeed be considered "the first Moldovanist." However, after he left Bessarabia in March 1914 this policy line was discontinued. Local voices in the field of identity politics only emerged during the revolutionary upheaval of 1917, amid a fluid and violent landscape defined by the experience of World War I.

The Wartime "Nationalization" of the Russian Empire and its Significance

Aside from the dilemmas associated with the radical shift in "population politics" and the growing intervention of the state into the economic and social spheres,⁶² after the outbreak of World War I the Russian government also faced the challenge of containing nationalism and channeling its potential to suit its own purposes. The question of the relative nationalization of the Russian Empire's population in the initial phase of the war is thus of fundamental importance. The first phenomenon worth considering in this context is inter-imperial competition. The role of this kind of rivalry has been recently explored by Alexei Miller, who advances the view that the collapse of the "macro-system" of Eurasian continental empires during World War I was largely a self-inflicted catastrophe.⁶³ The elites of the Rus-

⁶² For a comprehensive discussion of these issues, see the following works by Eric Lohr and Peter Holquist: Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign Against Enemy Aliens During World War I* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Eric Lohr, "The Russian Army and the Jews: Mass Deportation, Hostages, and Violence during World War I," *The Russian Review* 60, no. 3 (July 2001): 404–19; Peter Holquist, "Violent Russia, Deadly Marxism? Russia in the Epoch of Violence, 1905–1921," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 4, no. 3 (Summer 2003): 627–52; Peter Holquist, "La société contre l'Etat, la société conduisant l'Etat: la société cultivée et le pouvoir d'Etat en Russie, 1914–1921," *Le Mouvement Social*, no. 196 (July–September 2001): 21–40.

⁶³ The general argument focusing on the "entangled" history of the Eurasian continental empires, which resulted in a specific macro-system during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, is developed in Alexei Miller, "Between Local and Inter-Imperial: Russian Imperial History in Search of Scope and Paradigm," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 7–26, esp. 18–20. For a discussion of the reasons for the collapse of this macro-system, see Alexei Miller, *Pochemu vse kontinental'nye imperii raspalis' posle Pervoi Mirovoi voyny?* [Why did all the continental empires collapse after World War I?], *Polit.ru*, April 11, 2006, accessed on March 25, 2016. <http://www.polit.ru/article/2006/04/11/miller2/>.

sian, Habsburg, Ottoman, and German empires consciously breached the former conventions of interstate relations in the region and violated the principles of rational behavior in the process. Dating the origins of this transformation to the disruption of the Concert of Europe during the Crimean War, Miller insists that it was World War I that finally destroyed this system of interconnected states. Rather than follow the traditional paradigm, which emphasizes the subversive potential of national movements, Miller argues that the manipulation of ethnicity by belligerent empires led to the ultimate implosion of these multiethnic polities. In this regard, the presence of the same ethnic groups across imperial borders warrants further scholarly investigation. There is a substantial amount of empirical evidence on the creation of national military units and the financing of nationalist organizations by military adversaries to undermine the internal stability and counter the propaganda of enemy powers.⁶⁴ Local officials were keenly aware of such dangers even in border provinces that were not strictly part of the war zone.⁶⁵ While Miller's theory might be criticized for focusing too much attention on inter-imperial rather than imperial/nation-state rivalries,⁶⁶ his point that the imperial framework was crucial for the development and consolidation of ethnic nationalism is convincing.

The degree of nationalization of the Russian population by the summer of 1914 and during the first phases of the war is contested. The contending interpretations stem not so much from the available data as from the contested definitions of nationalism used by different authors. The predominantly rural nature of the empire's population and the uncertain nationalizing effect of the imperial army seems to indicate the weak impact of nationalism on most Russian subjects' self-awareness. In any case, even if the war was a formative period in terms of nationalizing the masses, the 1914 situation is treated differently. Joshua Sanborn has recently argued for a reconsideration of the question of the Russian nation in wartime, asserting that "the national political form does not require agreement or loyalty, either between segments of the population or between citizens and the regime," since "the nation by definition opens up this space of contestation."⁶⁷ The author then relies on Rogers Brubaker's model of "nationness

⁶⁴ Bessarabia was one of the cases involved, as will be argued in more detail below. The Ukrainian case is arguably even more interesting.

⁶⁵ Miller, *Pochemu vse kontinental'nye imperii raspalis' posle Pervoi Mirovoi voyny?*

⁶⁶ This criticism is certainly valid for Bessarabia where Russia had to deal with the irredentist claims of a national rather than an imperial state. However, the processes at work were very similar, and thus Miller's thesis should not be discarded.

⁶⁷ Joshua Sanborn, "The Mobilization of 1914 and the Question of the Russian Nation: A Reexamination," *Slavic Review* 59, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 267–89, quotation on 282.

as event” to argue that “nationness is *both* an event that suddenly crystallizes *and* one that is the product of deep developmental trends.”⁶⁸

Despite Sanborn’s preference for a “kinetic” interpretation that allows for the preliminary buildup of potential energy, his conclusion remains somewhat disconcerting. His insistence on the fallacy of the link between the emergence of “nationness” and the urban environment should be taken into account, but he seems to overstate the case for a peculiar “peasant nationalism.” The national framework that the peasants used in their public dealings with the government is a classic case of discursive influence from above. In my view, World War I should be seen as an inflection point that set the conditions for activating the potential energies of the broader self-identification of the peasantry. More importantly, Sanborn acknowledges the different directions where emerging nation-building projects were heading due to the conflicts within the Russian bureaucracy. Thus, one could agree with the argument that “the real barriers to nation-formation . . . were the conservative state officials who feared an active populace and scuttled plans for the formal incorporation of peasants into national political structures whenever they could.”⁶⁹ However, even such an interpretation presupposes the coherence of the Russian bureaucratic apparatus that Sanborn exaggerates. The conflicts surrounding the most effective principle of mass mobilization were in fact related to the much deeper division over the question of the nature and spatial configuration of the Russian nation itself.

The example of A. N. Kuropatkin, one of the most prominent military figures during the last decades of the imperial regime, clearly illustrates this point. Kuropatkin’s attitude toward the Russian nationalist project was far from coherent. Thus, during his tenure as war minister, Kuropatkin submitted a report to Nicholas II in which he argues against the Russian Empire’s annexation of East Prussia and Galicia, viewing these regions as a sort of “East European Alsace-Lorraine.” During World War I, however, his opinion changed completely. In a report reflecting on “Russia’s borders as a result of the 1914–15 war,” he advocates the annexation of eastern Galicia and those parts of Hungary and Bukovina with a majority “Russian” population. His main argument in this regard was the “unification of the Russian tribe [*plemeni*].”⁷⁰ Kuropatkin’s ostensible complaint concerning the crisis of traditional legitimizing criteria (“devotion to the Tsar . . .

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 284.

⁷⁰ A. Iu. Bakhturina, *Okraïny Rossiiskoi Imperii: Gosudarstvennoe upravlenie i natsional’naia politika v gody Pervoi Mirovoi voïny (1914–1917 gg.)* [The borderlands of the Russian Empire: State administration and nationalities policy during World War I, 1914–1917] (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2004), 123–24.

and Fatherland") referred not so much to the pre-national, dynastic overtones of these notions, but primarily to their nationalist reinterpretation whose perceived failure he regretted.⁷¹ This is one of Sanborn's major shortcomings in his otherwise fruitful discussion of the emerging problem of integrating Russian subjects into a modern community during wartime. Though attentive to the vertical social stratification of the Russian populace, his focus on the Russian peasantry ignores the horizontal fault lines between ethnic groups in the imperial borderlands that were activated after 1914. The picture becomes even more complex when one takes into account the observation of a critic who argued that Sanborn "underestimate[d] the degree to which nation, empire, and class pulled in different directions from 1916," leading to increasing social polarization along the lines of discrete and opposing political "languages."⁷² In fact, such developments even occurred in earlier phases of the war, starting from the "Great Retreat" of the Russian armies in the summer of 1915, and were thus a general feature of the whole period.

The extent to which the government and the public tried to forge an ideal community by inculcating an awareness of the common war effort or by creating a cult of heroes and exceptional feats remains a contentious issue. Recent investigations have argued that Russia equaled its cobelligerents in constructing a whole infrastructure of memory and commemoration in order to foster a feeling of common belonging and state cohesion among the population.⁷³ Melissa Stockdale remarks that "honoring, rewarding, and commemorating the nation's soldiers was a way to sidestep vexing differences in the multinational state and bring all together on common ground."⁷⁴ This "common ground," however, remained mostly an unattainable ideal due to the fundamental differences between the attitudes of military and civilian officials toward the participation of peasants in the Great War. Far from perceiving the soldiers of the Russian

⁷¹ Sanborn, "The Mobilization of 1914," 284.

⁷² Eric Lohr, "Russian Economic Nationalism during the First World War: Moscow Merchants and Commercial Diasporas," *Nationalities Papers* 31, no. 4 (December 2003): 471–84, quotation on 471.

⁷³ Melissa K. Stockdale, "United in Gratitude: Honoring Soldiers and Defining the Nation in Russia's Great War," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 7, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 459–85.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 484. For a cogent criticism of Stockdale's position, see Alfred J. Rieber, "The Problem of Social Cohesion," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 7, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 599–608, esp. 603–4. While admitting that these projects represented "the last attempt of the autocracy to forge a unified, national community," Rieber concludes that "many problems remain in developing the idea that the Russian Empire was moving toward a generally accepted definition of citizenship," 604.

army as potential citizens, some high-ranking military commanders regarded them as unfit for modern warfare because of their parochial interests and lack of understanding of “the idea of fighting for Russia.”⁷⁵ Despite the unprecedented scale of the public’s involvement in wartime developments and the major destabilizing impact of mass population movements on the empire’s social fabric, the central authorities relegated the bulk of the population to a passive and subordinate role. The inability of the imperial state to impose its integrative projects upon a restive population (and its success in promoting highly exclusionary practices of ethnic discrimination) ultimately proved fatal for the imperial regime during the upheaval that plunged the empire and especially its borderlands into a maelstrom of confusion and violence.

In the initial period of the war, nationalizing central policies led to certain shifts in the local ethnic hierarchy in Bessarabia. The case of the Bessarabian Romanians was different in comparison to other collectively targeted ethnic groups such as Germans and Jews. The imperial authorities took a nuanced view of the local population in terms of its loyalty and separatist potential. That is, they believed that various social groups among the Bessarabian Romanian-speaking population displayed different levels of reliability and loyalty to the empire. The authorities found only a small group of local intelligentsia to be inclined toward separatism. At the same time, peasants and most local landowners were considered quite reliable imperial subjects. This complex perception of the local population stood in stark contrast to the wartime perception of groups defined as “enemy aliens” in the Romanov Empire or in the Habsburg Empire (in the latter case, particularly the Ruthenians/Ukrainians). In these cases, a much more essentialist and homogeneous image of these ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups crystallized.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ See Stockdale’s discussion (that significantly undermines her argument) of the bitter disagreement between the chief of staff of the General Headquarters, General N. Ianushkevich, and the minister of agriculture, A. V. Krivoshein. While Ianushkevich expressed his deep skepticism regarding the existence of any “national feeling” among peasant conscripts and soldiers, Krivoshein, along with the other ministers, strongly objected. Disagreement on such fundamental issues was symptomatic of the lack of unity among Russian political and military leaders. See Stockdale, “United in Gratitude,” 472–74. Ianushkevich’s xenophobic nationalism did not preclude him from expressing little faith in effective mobilizing factors beyond purely material incentives.

⁷⁶ The religious factor should not be underestimated when assessing the nationality policies of the Russian Empire during World War I. This factor clearly played a central role in the policies of Russian occupation authorities in Galicia, especially during the first phase of Russian military control over the region in 1914–15. Despite the predominantly national framework and the rhetoric of “restoring na-

The link between internal political agendas and foreign policy priorities was of course obvious in other borderlands and temporarily occupied territories as well. A case in point was Northern Bukovina, a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire bordering Bessarabia. The ethnic composition of this province (featuring Ukrainians, Romanians, Germans, Jews, Hungarians, and others) confronted the Russian authorities with yet another nationality policy conundrum. Although Northern Bukovina, like Eastern Galicia, was included on the map of Russian national expansion due to its large Ukrainian-speaking population, the actual policies of the Russian military authorities during the short-lived occupation of the territory in the fall of 1914 differed markedly from the Galician scenario. Russian authorities attempted to placate Bukovina's Romanian elites through a lenient approach to the provincial hierarchy of the Orthodox Church and by relying on local Romanian representatives as administrators (for example, the Jewish mayor of Czernowitz/Cernăuți was replaced by a prominent Romanian). Moreover, the envoy of the Russian Foreign Ministry in Bukovina advocated transferring power to elected representatives of the local Romanian population following the likely Russian retreat from the region. Thus, Russian nationality policy in the region was subordinated to the larger goal of attracting Romania to the Entente. Although the attitude of the local population was generally hostile toward the Russian Empire, Russian occupation authorities pursued a pragmatic policy motivated by their interest to strengthen their influence over the government in Bucharest.⁷⁷

Following the declaration of war in late July 1914, Bessarabia immediately entered the zone of military administration. This temporary shift in the region's legal status directly influenced the authorities' attitude toward the presence of "unreliable" individuals in the province. The degree of Bessarabian Romanians' unreliability from the perspective of Russian officialdom was not comparable to the more directly targeted ethnic groups, such as Jews and Germans. Nevertheless, the accusation of Romanophilia had much more serious consequences during the years of Romania's neu-

tional unity" and reaching Russia's "natural ethnographic borders," the practical problem posed by the strength of the Uniate Church became a sore point for Russian occupation authorities. It also uncovered the different approaches of some of the military authorities and the interventionist strategy pursued by Archbishop Evlogii. For a detailed discussion of the confessional policy of the Russian Empire in occupied Eastern Galicia, see Bakhturina, *Okrainy Rossiiskoi Imperii: Gosudarstvennoe upravlenie*, 167–208. On the "war of faiths" and the respective roles of Archbishop Evlogii and Metropolitan Sheptyts'kyi during the Russian occupation of Galicia, see Mark von Hagen, *War in a European Borderland: Occupations and Occupation Plans in Galicia and Ukraine, 1914–1918* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 37–42.

⁷⁷ Bakhturina, *Okrainy Rossiiskoi Imperii: Gosudarstvennoe upravlenie*, 156–57.

trality and uncertain military allegiance than during the immediate prewar period. An important change in the authorities' perception of internal subversion was related to the circulation of false and pernicious rumors among the civil population of the *guberniia* and among the reservists during mobilization. The role of rumors as the most widespread and uncontrollable means of subverting collective morale heightened the general atmosphere of "war paranoia" and suspicion of foreign espionage.⁷⁸

One of the most interesting examples illustrating this point is the case of Elena Alistar, a Bessarabian-born activist in the Romanian women's rights movement who was then a student at the University of Iași.⁷⁹ Alistar was accused of spreading rumors about an impending Russian-Romanian war among young reservists recruited from her native village. The accusations were serious enough to draw the attention of Bessarabia's chief of Gendarmes, Colonel Nordberg, who later interrogated her in person. Despite finding no concrete evidence of "subversive anti-war propaganda," he recommended that Alistar be expelled from Bessarabia and "other border *guberniias*" for the duration of the war on the grounds that she was "a convinced and extreme Romanophile."⁸⁰ Alistar's activities appeared even more troubling because of her association with a Romanian citizen arrested for suspected military espionage.⁸¹

Later in the war a similar decision was issued in the case of Daniil Ciugurean, one of the most prominent members of the Romanophile circle

⁷⁸ The persistence and variety of rumors concerning Bessarabia's future relationship to Romania was a constant source of anxiety for local authorities even prior to 1914. For example, Madan related a rumor, which appeared during the Russo-Japanese War, referring to a mysterious delegation of "Bessarabians" that purportedly went to the Romanian King Carol I and asked him to have Romanian troops ready to "occupy Bessarabia" in case of a Russian military defeat. See ANRM, fond 297, op. 1, d. 98, l. 182. Also cited in Negru, *Țarismul și mișcarea națională a românilor din Basarabia*, 165. Another revealing example is cited by the Romanian historian Gh. Ghibănescu, who undertook several journeys through Bessarabia during 1912 and 1913 and registered a rumor about the planned marriage of the Romanian Prince Charles (the future Carol II) to a Russian Grand Duchess. According to this rumor, Bessarabia would be "returned" to Romania as a "dowry" for the young couple. The source was mentioned in the report cited above, which annexed an article from the Romanian newspaper *Universul* of January 28, 1914. See GARF, fond 529, op. 1, d. 26, l. 12.

⁷⁹ Elena Alistar had a rather high profile in interwar Romania as the most prominent Bessarabian member of Romania's women's organizations. She was also the head of the Bessarabian section of the Society of Romanian Women.

⁸⁰ Decision of the chief of Bessarabian Gendarmes, Colonel Nordberg, dated September 19, 1914. See ANRM, fond 297, op. 1, d. 520, ff. 31–33, here l. 33. Also cited in Negru, *Țarismul și mișcarea națională a românilor din Basarabia*, 185–89.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, l. 33.

who later served in the first government of the Moldavian Democratic Republic in late 1917 and early 1918.⁸² Russian military authorities' orders to apply radical repressive measures were not followed by more lenient civilian officials who rejected the decision of the chief of the Gendarmes. This disunity shows how different emphases and conflicting interests within the Russian bureaucracy led to unforeseen outcomes even in the tense atmosphere of the war.

By late 1915, the specter of an emerging national movement in Bessarabia resurfaced in the reports of the region's Gendarmes' office. Since Romania's position in the war was still uncertain (despite growing pro-Entente sentiment), open conflict between Russia and Romania remained a possibility. Thus, the chief of Gendarmes emphasized the "peculiarity of the Bessarabian *guberniia*—namely, the national Moldavian question, which until now has elicited scant, or, better to say, almost no attention, since the population of this nationality is considered to be rather loyal. This is undoubtedly true."⁸³ He described the peasant masses as inert and unaffected by "Russian patriotism," but nevertheless economically attracted to the Russian Empire, which guaranteed greater material well-being compared to its Romanian rival. Nordberg astutely noted the crucial role of "the events of 1905" and the 1912 anniversary in creating a group "among the local intelligentsia" that "strive[s] toward the 'cultural self-consciousness of the Moldavians,' or, as they call them more often nowadays, 'Romanians.'"⁸⁴ The new development that concerned Nordberg was the "propaganda among the peasant masses," which intensified during the war. The war also had a destabilizing effect since it "created certain illusions of a separatist character" among these rebellious intellectuals.⁸⁵ Commenting on its general weakness, Nordberg observed that this movement "ha[d] a certain reflection" in local society.⁸⁶

Thus, the prevailing nationalist logic compelled Russian authorities to interpret the situation in Bessarabia as a borderland question. The threat of separatism or Romanian irredentism was mostly the mental construct of insecure imperial officials who faced new challenges in a multiethnic con-

⁸² Decision of the chief of Bessarabian Gendarmes, Colonel Nordberg, dated September 5, 1915. The evidence uncovered in Ciugurean's case confirming his involvement in revolutionary and nationalist propaganda was more compelling. See ANRM, fond 297, op. 1, d. 358, ll. 17–18. Also cited in Negru, *Țarismul și mișcarea națională a românilor din Basarabia*, 190–92.

⁸³ Report of the chief of Bessarabian Gendarmes, Colonel Nordberg, dated October 31, 1915. ANRM, fond 297, op. 1, d. 312, ll. 6, 9, here l. 9. Also cited in Negru, *Țarismul și mișcarea națională a românilor din Basarabia*, 193.

⁸⁴ Ibid. Quotation marks in original.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

text. Weak but increasingly vocal, local intellectual circles also created the basis for transforming the moderate, culturally oriented grievances of the Moldavian intelligentsia into a full-fledged separatist project. There were, however, grounds for Russian officials' insecurity, which emerged not so much in Bessarabia as in the Romanian Kingdom, where anti-Russian rhetoric exploited the "Bessarabian question" in internal political struggles. These polemics culminated during the first two years of the war when Romania's foreign policy options were still open.

The Controversy over the "Bessarabian Question" in the Romanian Kingdom (1914–16)

Before 1914, interest in Bessarabia in Romanian intellectual circles and the political establishment was ephemeral. This changed periodically at certain moments when political turmoil in the Russian Empire or the official ceremonies staged by the Russian monarchy elicited a response from Romania. Aside from the polemics sparked by the 1912 anniversary, another telling example was the 1905 Revolution, though the intensity of the Romanian reaction was much weaker. In addition to Moruzi's writings, another important author who left a detailed account of Bessarabian affairs was Nicolae Iorga. The Romanian historian undertook a short journey through the region in the spring of 1905.⁸⁷ Though his primary interest was in the Romanian historical monuments on Bessarabian soil—including the fortresses on the Dniester and the few remaining medieval and early modern churches—Iorga, who was also a militant nationalist, could not refrain from remarking on the contemporary situation. A striking feature of his narrative was the prominence he gave to the "Jewish question," to which he devoted most of his analytical acumen. This even led some of his political adversaries to accuse him of disproportionately focusing on the Jews instead of concentrating on the Romanian-speaking population. The latter was traditionally viewed as a stagnant rural multitude. Given Iorga's conservative peasantry, his Bessarabian travelogue contains idyllic rural imagery meant to emphasize the organic symbiosis between peasants and their environment. However, in a more pragmatic turn of his analysis, Iorga appears much less enthralled about the nature of this phenomenon: "And the fact that here there is no question of a Romanian life, however weak, within any other social stratum except the peasantry is really terrible."⁸⁸ For Iorga, this deplorable situation in an epoch when the importance of mass politics was acknowledged even by staunch conservatives was the product of the whole-

⁸⁷ See Iorga, *Neamul românesc în Basarabia*.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 86.

sale Russification of local society, whose political views, interests, and even speech were markedly different from those of the Kingdom's elites. The historian's position vis-à-vis Bessarabia's "cultured elements" was one of deep mistrust and lack of understanding, notwithstanding the increasingly frequent contacts between Bessarabians and Romanians of the Kingdom. These contacts, in Iorga's view, were distorted by the prejudices that the former held against Romania. Thus, "there are periodic trips [to Romania], but only the bad side of things is noticed. Naturally, Bucharest cannot bear any comparison to brilliant Odessa, but it is very painful to hear it being said by a Romanian who has neither the face nor, quite often, the speech of a Romanian!"⁸⁹

Another persistent cliché in Iorga's work is the Russian Empire's organization of the urban landscape. As in other cases, Iorga posits a direct link between the despotic tsarist regime and the scale and spatial arrangement of official buildings in the region's cities. Imposing architecture appears as the quintessential symbol of autocracy and as the epitome of the enormous and frightening Russian space. "It can be seen," Iorga asserts, "that this limitless empire desired to express, through these enormous masses of stone, its power and durability, which nothing could shatter. . . . One seems to breathe harder when seeing these huge facades of white stone that press both upon the earth and upon human souls. . . . A wild majesty and a wild wealth pour forth from them."⁹⁰ Even if monumental and impressive, the Russian style was foreign and rigid in a manner that underscored the alienation of Bessarabia from its natural environment. Iorga remains unclear about the degree of Bessarabia's belonging to the nation, but he contends that the continuity of the village might compensate for the grandeur of an oppressive regime. Bessarabia's state of rural immobility derived, in Iorga's view, not only from the ethnic vitality of the Romanian element, but from the indifference and carelessness of the Russian administration.

An explicit comparison between the situation of the peasantry in Bessarabia and Bukovina only reinforces his conclusion. While in Bukovina the "Romanian village" was plagued by the influx of Ruthenians, excessive taxation, and above all the pernicious activities of Jewish officials and usurers, none of this could be encountered in Bessarabian villages, which preserved their original patriarchal culture and where state authority was embodied in an "[ethnically] Romanian policeman."⁹¹ This description alludes to the under-governance characteristic of the Russian Empire even in the early twentieth century. As in other cases, however, this comparison only

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 85–86.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

serves as a pretext for Iorga to contrast the virtues of traditional society with the flaws of modernity: "It follows from all of this that a scandalously bad administration, a non-existent [*nulă*] administration can, in some circumstances, be more favorable than an administration that is too efficient. The latter assists 'civilization,' imposes its forms and appearances, but does the natural development of a people, which cannot rush [to civilization] without being killed, not represent something higher than these forms?"⁹² The same rhetoric later re-emerged in the polemics surrounding the 1912 anniversary. Thus, in its rural essence Bessarabia symbolized a missed opportunity for organic development for the Romanian Kingdom, but also for Bessarabia due to the alienation of its educated classes from the otherwise uncorrupted peasantry. If the Romanian state was interventionist and brutally transformative, the Russian state's sole merit was its absence at the local level.

A final aspect of Iorga's analysis focuses on the absence of any signs of a national movement in Bessarabia, which he attributes to the ostensible inertia of the masses and the purported success of Russification among the elites. In fact, Iorga pursued a bitter struggle against his potential competitors on the field of nationalism in Romania. The thrust of his argument was directed against the "false nationalism" of Bessarabian immigrants to the Kingdom, whose activities he regarded as futile. In Iorga's opinion, "the only nationalist Bessarabians are those who have passed to us [to Romania] for various reasons." His main target is Hasdeu, whom, along with his unnamed peers, Iorga accuses of developing a "platonic nationalism" that did not affect Bessarabian life in any serious way: "If these Romanians from Bessarabia did in their native province, with all prudence required to avoid any misfortune, one percent of what they say in Romania, our nation beyond the Prut would have evolved in an entirely different direction."⁹³

In another work written on the occasion of the 1912 events, Iorga attempts to inventory the most prominent Bessarabian writers and intellectuals who pursued a career in Romania. The nationalist-conservative criteria that Iorga uses to assess their relative usefulness for the national cause lead him to conclude that Bessarabia did not produce a figure capable of expressing the national program as he understood it: "A Bessarabian consciousness, at times full of pain, at times full of hope, or touched in passing by the wings of joy was absent, however."⁹⁴ Hasdeu, though judged less severely, is viewed as an exceptional individual, but precisely because of his uniqueness he is unable to represent Bessarabia. Similarly, prominent

⁹² *Ibid.*, 77–78.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁹⁴ Iorga, "Basarabia noastră" [Our Bessarabia], in *Neamul românesc în Basarabia*, 305.

younger figures of Bessarabian descent like Stere and Arbore are criticized for their leftist leanings. Iorga rages against the purely "material and political" goals of Russian populism whose nefarious consequences seemed to penetrate into Romania along with its bearers from beyond the Prut. "A violent [*iute*], but barren current," Iorga asserts, "in comparison with the slow, but steady development of national realities, it [populism] annihilated, both here and beyond the Prut, the actions of such richly cultured people as Zamfir Arbore and C. Stere."⁹⁵ In his view, even such exceptional individuals did not adequately represent Bessarabia within Romanian national discourse, providing instead unrealistic solutions to Romania's problems. The primacy of social grievances articulated by these ideologues was quite unlike Iorga's organicist and rather vague concept of national harmony that would provide a miraculous cure for Romania's ills. The "Bessarabian question" was as much, if not more, present on the map of internal political struggles in the Kingdom as it was on the mental map of the ideal fatherland.

This became even clearer after 1914 when the war changed the context of the "Bessarabian question" and transformed it into a pressing geopolitical issue. Romania's membership in the Triple Alliance of the Central Powers came under strain in the immediate prewar years. The intensification of the Kingdom of Hungary's nationalizing efforts that led to growing tensions in Transylvania, the ambiguous behavior of the Austro-Hungarian government during the latter phase of the Balkan Wars, the changes in the political leadership of both major Romanian parties, and the concurrent growth of Francophile tendencies among the political establishment all constituted major obstacles to the continuation of the previous foreign policy course. Though the Conservative government of Titu Maiorescu and Take Ionescu renewed the alliance treaty with the Central Powers in 1913, the latter were aware that Romania had become an unreliable partner. More ominously, direct negotiations between the Hungarian prime minister Count Tisza and the leaders of the Romanian national parties in Transylvania failed in early 1914. These negotiations were supported both by the government in Bucharest, hopeful for a settlement with the Hungarians, and by the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Office, anxious to placate its ally in the turbulent post-Balkan Wars period.

In parallel to these developments, a gradual change in Russian-Romanian relations occurred. This change should be analyzed in the context of the normalization of Russia's image in Western Europe just before World War I.⁹⁶ Romanian Francophilia and the pro-Western stance of Rus-

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 307.

⁹⁶ Martin Malia, *Russia under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum*, 163–65.

sian Foreign Minister Sergei Sazonov provided a congenial atmosphere for direct negotiations between high-ranking Russian and Romanian officials. The culmination of these preliminary efforts came in June 1914, two weeks before the Sarajevo murder of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne,⁹⁷ when the Romanian King Carol I met Nicholas II in Constanța.⁹⁸ These fluctuations in Romania's international position were only enhanced by the uncertainty within governing circles in Bucharest following the onset of hostilities. At the Crown Council held on August 3, 1914, the overwhelming majority of the country's politicians summoned for the occasion rejected King Carol I's proposal to join the Central Powers and opted instead for strict neutrality. In fact, this decision signaled the beginning of a hectic diplomatic campaign that went hand in hand with the heated polemics over the country's future course in the war. Following King Carol I's death in September 1914, supporters of the Central Powers steadily lost ground to the pro-Entente faction that held the upper hand through its active press campaign and benefited from a strong following from the ranks of both the governing Liberals and the opposition Conservatives. The government led since January 1914 by the Liberal politician Ion I. C. Brătianu hesitated for two more years before bringing Romania into the war in August 1916. This interlude witnessed open competition between national priorities in which the "Bessarabian question" suddenly assumed unprecedented importance.

Before analyzing the polemics between the pro-Entente and pro-German factions, a discussion of two important works on the "Bessarabian question" is necessary. Both of these works appeared during 1915 and thus bear the imprint of the war.⁹⁹ The difference between them is that the first was written by a young scholar from the Romanian Kingdom, Vasile D. Moisiu, whereas the latter was written by a Bessarabian émigré, Axinte Frunză, who advocated a radical pro-German orientation. Moisiu's book was published after the author's journey through Bessarabia in 1914 immediately before the outbreak of the war. It thus belongs more to the genre of impressionistic travelogues epitomized by Iorga's writings than to the politically charged and polemical genre adopted by Axinte Frunză. Moisiu specifically rejected any irredentist agenda, claiming that his book pursued the purely intellectual goal of filling a gap in the knowledge of a Romanian-inhabited land. At the outset, he claims that the only emotion an educated Romanian could feel in the current circumstances was one of "platonic compassion," adding that his interest in Bessarabia was of an ethnographic

⁹⁷ This refers to the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, the Austro-Hungarian heir to the throne, on June 28, 1914.

⁹⁸ Nicolae Ciachir, *Marile Puteri și România (1856–1947)* [The Great Powers and Romania: 1856–1947] (Bucharest: Albatros, 1996), 155–56.

⁹⁹ Moisiu, *Știri din Basarabia de astăzi*; and Axinte Frunză, *România Mare*.

nature: "I would not exaggerate if I said that we knew too little about Bessarabia. And we must know her not for the purpose of conquest, but because a part of our nation's body lives there, a part which, in many respects, is worth knowing, researching, seeing."¹⁰⁰ Consequently, the ignorance and indifference displayed by the Kingdom toward Bessarabia constituted the central part of his argument. Thus, "for the Kingdom Romanians, Bessarabia, though desired and mourned, has always remained a '*terra ignota*,' a dark labyrinth."¹⁰¹ This was due to the scarcity of reliable information on the region in the Romanian press and to the shortage of specialists who displayed a sincere interest in Bessarabian affairs "from a Romanian point of view." According to Moisiu, even the Bessarabian émigré community in Romania failed to fulfill this duty due to its reluctance to concentrate on such a painful subject, and because of the peculiar "distortion of perception" that did not allow it to fully appreciate the similarities and differences between the Kingdom and Bessarabia.¹⁰² Despite ostensibly striving for objectivity, Moisiu does not fail to make revealing parallels between the "plight" of Bessarabia and Alsace-Lorraine. He uses an even wider array of historical references, invoking the "grief" of English and Austrian monarchs for the lost territories of Calais and Silesia as appropriate parallels for Romania's position toward Bessarabia.¹⁰³

In his writings, the author follows the unanimous opinion of Romanian writers concerning the importance of Bessarabian peasants as the repository of the national essence. A Bessarabian village thus appears indistinguishable from its counterpart in Romanian Moldavia, though Moisiu observes a higher degree of material well-being among the peasants of the Russian *guberniia*.¹⁰⁴ A corollary of this situation is the alienation of the upper classes, which the author attributes to their propensity to safeguard their material interests rather than a conscious policy of the Russian authorities. The image of the Russian administration that emerges from Moisiu's account is contradictory. Condemning its "brutal indolence" and the "stifling" and "tendentious" impact of Russian culture, he simultaneously asserts that Russian authorities never pursued a systematic policy of denationalization and were rather careless about their subjects' loyalty to the state.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, he dismisses the idea of any substantial pro-

¹⁰⁰ Moisiu, *Știri din Basarabia de astăzi*, 8.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 7. Moisiu's arsenal of revealing parallels even extends to the realm of Greek mythology. Thus, he compares Bessarabia to an "enchanted and lost Medea," and Macedonia is likened to a "desperate Hecuba."

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 57, 188.

Romanian sentiments among the overwhelming majority of the population. The Russian authorities' accusations of separatism were absolutely unfounded since the subject of "Bessarabia's rapprochement with Romania" was never present "in the thoughts" of the local clergy and intellectuals. The national movements of other ethnic groups (including the quintessential Polish model) appear in Moisiu's narrative as the trigger for the awakening of Bessarabian national consciousness.¹⁰⁶ The clergy was the main social group that articulated the grievances of the Moldavian peasantry, despite the fact that it was anxious to prove its loyalty to the imperial state.

Still, Moisiu remains rather pessimistic about the emergence of a full-fledged separatist agenda, not least because of the "distorted" image of the Romanian Kingdom created by the official school system and propaganda.¹⁰⁷ The question of Romania's image among the Bessarabian peasantry prompted Moisiu to devote a fragment of his work to the most salient stereotypes that were partly inculcated by Russian high culture and partly indicative of broader patterns of popular thought. It is difficult to assess how much of this picture was actually taken from oral sources and how much was built upon earlier Romanian accounts of the region. According to Moisiu, the Moldavian peasantry perceived Kingdom Romanians as "brothers" who suffered under the rule of a foreign king and were cruelly exploited by "boyars and Jews." The characteristic signs of otherness were mainly visible in two respects: religion and language. The first cluster of stereotypes held that Romanian elites had abandoned Orthodoxy and converted to their king's "German" faith. Only the "poor Christians" (i.e., the peasants) preserved the true faith, but even they were threatened by spiritual corruption and material decay due to their "betrayal" of their ancestors' tradition. Moisiu's interviewees seemed to believe that the Russian tsar was planning a campaign to "liberate the Christians from the damned hands of the German [king], the boyars, and the Jews."¹⁰⁸

The second sign of alienation was the use of the Latin alphabet, which, due to its Roman character, was not suitable for an Orthodox people and was thus perceived as an imposition of the foreign leaders controlling Romania. The "sanctity" of the Russian script was an idea that Moisiu attributed to the "education received at school and in the church," thus emphasizing its "official" origins.¹⁰⁹ Another dimension of the language problem was related to the differences between the Bessarabian peasant dialect and

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 90–91.

¹⁰⁷ Moisiu notes, however, the pressing nature of the social question in Romania and the problems this might entail for the future integration of Bessarabia into the Romanian nation-state. See *ibid.*, 91.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 92.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

standard Romanian. The attitude of Moisiu's subjects seemed to oscillate between mistrust of any attempt to develop high culture in "Moldavian" and the timid realization of this potential evolution when confronted with educated Romanians from the Kingdom. The author devotes a whole chapter to the presentation and analysis of the linguistic peculiarities of the Bessarabian Romanians, concluding that despite dialectal features and the influence of Russian, linguistic unity remained unaltered.¹¹⁰

Moisiu then focuses his attention on the stereotypes and prejudices that both Bessarabian peasants and cultured elites held with respect to the Russians. He notes that "the Russian people and Russian culture—which is indeed significant among the upper classes—constitute an object of special affection for the Bessarabians."¹¹¹ This affection for the Russians, however, acquires an abstract and almost grotesque character in Moisiu's interpretation. Bessarabians, in his view, seemed to suffer from a collective "split vision" since they simultaneously upheld an idealized image of "Russians in general," but had a rather negative view of the Russians they encountered in Bessarabia. Moisiu maintains that the attitude toward the latter was marked by "a true disdain, an indifference, pride, and dignity, which were not ridiculous, but were a feature of the [Romanian] race."¹¹² Though he does not develop this psychological point further, it is clear that Moisiu is projecting his own visions of ethnic hierarchy upon the rather diffuse peasant xenophobia rooted in local Bessarabian society. For Moisiu, this "double" identity of the Russians in Bessarabian society revealed the gap between the effect of imperial propaganda (based on an image of unity and harmony) and the everyday reality of simmering ethnic tensions: "This is a curious instance of platonic love: the Russian language—not the one they hear—is for them delightful music, whereas the 'true Russian'—whom they do not see—is a chef d'oeuvre, both in body and soul."¹¹³ This contradictory split image of the other (doubly distorted through the lens of the Romanian observer) was more characteristic for the uneducated peasantry, since local intellectuals were far less ambiguous about the superiority of Russian culture and education. Moisiu narrates his encounters with representatives of these groups with equanimity and resignation, though his occasional remarks¹¹⁴ expose his subjective view on the immersion of Bessarabian intellectuals in Russian culture. To support his point about the

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 129–49.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 150.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., 151.

¹¹⁴ For example, "Russianism [*rusismul*] seeks to erect impenetrable walls between itself and the rest of the world, selecting the grain of truth with the shovel of censorship." See *ibid.*, 152.

powerful impact of official propaganda on the Bessarabian public, the author provides extensive passages (in Romanian translation) from official publications printed during the 1912 anniversary. Though he hardly comments on them, his implicit goal is to convince his Romanian audience to follow the example of the Russian authorities in mounting a much more vigorous campaign that would challenge the Russian Empire's virtual monopoly on the discursive representation of the region.¹¹⁵

One particularly novel aspect of Moisiu's approach is his proposal for the Romanian government's change of strategy and attitude toward Bessarabia. This also entailed a change in the perception of the Russian Empire that the author recommends in his conclusion: "Our mentality regarding Russia, as well as our attitude toward the Moldavian people of Bessarabia should be radically altered. The enlightenment and education of a people cannot be based on fear and timid whispers; for this, heroism and sacrifices are needed to open new avenues."¹¹⁶ Such heroic sacrifices did not demand that Romanians follow the consecrated models of national resistance within the Russian Empire (embodied in the Polish uprisings) or the revolutionary solution of social transformations, which "have never awakened the consciousness of peoples." Moreover, "nihilist and anarchist ideas contributed nothing to mankind's welfare"¹¹⁷ and lured many educated Bessarabians in "the wrong direction, as indicated by certain elements that tend to destroy every state structure in the world."¹¹⁸ This unfortunate tendency also led Romanians to perceive Bessarabians as anarchic and dangerous. In Moisiu's view, both the internal conditions within the Russian Empire and the "Slavic temperament" reduced the likelihood of revolutionary upheaval.

His solution for curing these ills was founded upon two premises that he clearly linked to the future postwar settlement. First, he hoped for the Russian Empire's "recognition of the right to [autonomous] life of small peoples," according to the ideals proclaimed (but not fulfilled) by the belligerent powers. Second, he suggested intensifying "organic national work" in Romania that could only be achieved by overcoming the state's and public's "apathy."¹¹⁹ He proposed a rather unorthodox method of spreading the enlightenment of Romanian national culture to Bessarabia. Instead of disregarding the Russian intellectual tradition as dangerous or futile, Romanian youth should pursue their education in Russian gymnasias and universities where they could overcome the incomprehension and ignorance of

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 154–67.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 186.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

the Russian Empire so prevalent in Romania and directly influence Bessarabian students (who attended universities in European Russia in large numbers) through a "national-cultural" agenda.¹²⁰

This seemingly Russophile orientation was conceivable only following the liberalization of Russia's regime and Romania's abandonment of any irredentist plans for political unity. The long-term agenda of enlightening the masses also assumed the ethnic vitality of the Romanian peasantry in Bessarabia. Moisiu did not perceive any danger from this perspective, expressing his confidence in the "tenacity of our people's soul between the Prut and the Dniester" and asserting that "any waves that might come in the future will shatter against the same solid rock [of the people's essence] and will turn into mere drops."¹²¹ Both the rhetoric of perennial ethnicity and his anti-revolutionary stance seem to suggest that the young author was writing in the tradition of Iorga's school, albeit somewhat moderated by the war context in which the book appeared. Moisiu concludes with a renewed appeal to "drain the source of [Romanian] indifference" and to end the "spiritual isolation" between the Russian province and the Romanian state through concerted cultural activity with no immediate political goals in mind.¹²² Both the book's content and its interpretive framework are indicative of the prewar genre of ethnographic travelogues that eschewed any radical political messages. The polemical dimension of his argument mainly focuses on the inadequacy of Romania's concern for an alienated part of the national body. Though the author probably favored a pro-Entente orientation, the impact of World War I is hardly visible in the structure and narrative of his depiction of Bessarabia.

The second work dealing with the "Bessarabian question" is a polemical piece written explicitly within the context of the controversy over Romania's foreign policy orientation during the period of neutrality. The book is an acerbic pamphlet that points to the flaws of Romanian politics and society and criticizes Romania's hesitation to join the Central Powers. Axinte Frunză was particularly close to Zamfir Arbore, the embodiment of the dangerously radical Bessarabian émigré in the eyes of conservative nationalists grouped around Iorga. Frunză bases his argument on three main premises stemming from his radical populist and anarchist political views and his uncompromising opposition to the Russian imperial regime. First, he postulates the irreconcilable opposition between the Romanian peasantry and the official state in all its guises. Frunză extends the widely used populist theme of the gap between the lower and upper classes (including the state apparatus) to the level of complete foreignness. The related topics of inter-

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 187–88.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 188.

¹²² *Ibid.*

nal Orientalism, authenticity versus inauthenticity, the superficiality of state- and nation-building processes—accompanied by a vehemently anti-aristocratic and anti-elite stance—all found their way into the Bessarabian author's witty and ironic text.

Second, Frunză proclaims the immutability and supreme vitality of the “popular essence” both in the Romanian Kingdom and in Bessarabia not only despite, but also against the state. The combination of ethnic primordialism and anarchism combine to form a highly original vision of Romanians' ethnic expansion eastward and to celebrate the people's ahistoricity as opposed to the pseudo-historicity of the Romanian state. Third, he advocates a virulently anti-Russian and pro-German course, which is motivated as much by civilizational criteria and political-historical factors as by immediate state interests and military expediency. This last layer of his argument fits more neatly into the war polemics of the era and was a direct contribution to the raging controversy over war policy. The debates regarding the priorities of future nation-building efforts also featured Frunză as one of the more articulate yet overlooked representatives of the pro-Bessarabian faction.

The author builds his anti-establishment argument by criticizing modern Romanian institutions and the philosophy of national regeneration underpinning them. He challenges the Romanian political elite, accusing it of wasting the opportunity to build a viable nation-state and replace the veneer of patriotic rhetoric with effective reforms that would have transformed Romania into an organic political structure.¹²³ Furthermore, Frunză attacks both the social and national dimensions of Romania's nation-building process. In effect, his criticism amounts to a theory of internal colonialism in which the upper classes dominate the “barbarian” or “native” population—the Romanian peasantry. His rhetorical methods and polemical thrust are reminiscent of Eminescu's political journalism, which also transcended the lines of party politics and occasionally degenerated into angry denunciations of politicking and the emptiness of the country's elite. In fact, Frunză directly invokes Eminescu as a source of his opinions, and his anti-elite bias recalls the sketchy theory of the foreign “superposed stratum” elaborated by Eminescu.¹²⁴

Another source of Frunză's ideas regarding the artificial nature of the Romanian state apparatus was the “forms without substance” theory ad-

¹²³ Frunză, *România Mare*, chaps. 2–6, 13–54. A short biographical sketch on Frunză can be found in Iurie Colesnic, *Basarabia necunoscută* [The unknown Bessarabia], vol. 1 (Chişinău: Universitas, 1993), 12–15. Frunză's choice of title was not accidental. He sought to contrast the “true greatness” of the people with the politically oriented patriotic rhetoric extolling an ideal “Greater Romanian” state.

¹²⁴ Frunză, *România Mare*, 23.

vanced by the Junimist circle. However, Frunză's vision lacked Eminescu's autochthonist tendencies and the utopian and past-oriented regressive streak found in the latter's incoherent doctrine of Romanian specificity. Frunză's political preferences rested in the sphere of leftist populism and rejected any notion of official nationalism. The distinction between the political nation and the "true nation," separated by an "abyss," was the cornerstone of Frunză's whole scheme of modern Romanian history.¹²⁵ The "political nation," which was responsible for the social and cultural backwardness of the masses, included the hereditary aristocracy (and its direct successor, the propertied elites) and also the false "democrats" who inherited all the flaws of the aristocracy. These social strata were guilty of "false populism" that the author found particularly reprehensible.¹²⁶ Aside from the social dimension of state policy outlined in his text, Frunză condemns the inadequacy of Romania's attitude toward the national question. The author deplores the fact that "the degree of closeness between a subjugated province and the 'mother-country,' or the degree of preservation of the ethnic Romanian element is measured according to the *sum* allocated to a certain province within the budget of the Ministry of Public Instruction."¹²⁷ The discrepancy between the real grievances of the Romanians outside the Kingdom and the pseudo-patriotic rhetoric of the Romanian political establishment was so wide that it led to a faltering policy toward the Transylvanian national movement and to the emergence of a "Macedonian problem," which was blown out of proportion by certain interest groups within Romania and did not reflect the actual significance of the Romanian-speaking population in the Balkans.¹²⁸ These examples were designed to draw the attention of the reading public to Frunză's native region, which he felt was undeservedly ignored and marginalized. Unsurprisingly, the author laments the indifference and the "phenomenal ignorance" that characterized the Romanian public's attitude toward Bessarabia. This was mirrored by a similar tendency in Bessarabia, where Romania remained *terra incognita*.¹²⁹

This situation was not only a pretext for nationalist lamentation, however. The social aspect of the people versus elite dichotomy was much more important for Frunză. Despite the difference in scale, Frunză faced the same dilemma as Stere concerning the relative importance of the national versus the social dimension of Romanian state-building. Unlike Stere, Frunză's populist convictions were much less affected by his active

¹²⁵ Ibid., 38.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 20–22.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 29. Author's original emphasis.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 25–31.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 32–33.

involvement in Romanian political life and occasional compromises with the establishment. Although Frunză belonged to Stere's circle grouped around the journal *Viața Românească*, he always remained a marginal member because of his radical social opinions. In his wartime pamphlet, he rhetorically conflates the ostensibly patriotic Romanian elites with the Russified Bessarabian upper classes, thereby constructing an image of a materialistic and hypocritical interest group that consciously betrayed its self-proclaimed function of guiding the people in favor of securing a privileged economic and social status.¹³⁰ Thus, the real difference was not between the "progressive" Romanian state and the "backward" Russian Empire, but between the thin veneer of Western civilization internalized (or rather deformed) by their elites and the immutable ethnic vitality of the people. In an eloquent passage, Frunză describes the Romanian nation as a "cold and undecipherable mystery" that "does not shy away from anything, does not disappear, but neither does it assert itself, nor does it denationalize; even less so does it civilize or change."¹³¹ This immobile and essential state of nature was the only guarantee for the preservation of the unaltered and timeless national character. The author builds a binary opposition between the people as a natural element and the corrupted elites as the epitome of transience and treason:

Whereas the "boyars" disappear or degenerate, occasionally run away and reappear, betray, swear, lie, forget everything, change their language according to the regime, their religion according to territory, and their ideas along with their clothes, the people—who alone have remained "since time immemorial" on this soil, who ran nowhere, who did not cede any territory, did not swear, did not lie, and did not forget anything, who survived plagues and famines, and, like a . . . phoenix, were reborn from ashes and wars—the people rest immobile like the mountains, cold and indifferent as the waters, ever savage, ever uncivilized, ever young, and ever the same.¹³²

Somewhat paradoxically, the timelessness of the Romanian peasants guaranteed their ethnic survival and even expansion.¹³³ Frunză appears to have limitless faith in the elemental energy of the "eternally young [national] organism," which manifested itself with particular vigor in those regions where the existence of the "race" was most seriously threatened.¹³⁴ The use of this natural lexicon was not hazardous and went beyond the epoch's pervasive organic rhetoric. The author evidently seeks to integrate his image of a non-historical Romanian people into a scheme of nature versus

¹³⁰ Ibid., 41–54.

¹³¹ Ibid., 55.

¹³² Ibid., 56.

¹³³ Ibid., 64.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 58, see also 66.

culture invalidating the state as a meaningful actor in peasant life. This becomes clear in Frunză's discussion of the Bessarabian Romanians' "ethnic expansion" to the east, which, in his view, was an instinctive reaction to the oppression of the Russian Empire. This anarchic and instinctual migration led to the creation of "two more Moldavias" to the east of the Romanian Kingdom (i.e., Bessarabia and the Dniester-Bug region) that lacked any traces of Western institutions and preserved "the unaltered cultural background from the epoch of the [Moldavian] state's foundation [*descăli-cărei*]." ¹³⁵ These Romanian elements formed "not only a powerful Romanian boulevard in the face of Slavic influence, but also a strong body for an ethnic offensive advancing slowly and peacefully." ¹³⁶ However, Frunză asserts that "these Romanians have no history, just as the water of the Dniester or the woods of Orhei have no history." ¹³⁷

According to Frunză's theory, the Romanians' eastward expansion possessed all the features of a natural phenomenon governed by laws beyond the control of any human authority. The ethnic unity of the Romanian people was based on a peculiar genetic memory that inscribed the "amazing uniformity of physical types and linguistic unity which, by its almost total absence of dialects, could indeed exasperate all the philologists in the world." ¹³⁸ The conclusion that he draws from this picture of the vigor of the "savage" Romanian people clearly distinguishes between superficial state-led cultural projects and the organic, "indestructible solidarity of the race" expressed through "the background inherited by innumerable past generations." ¹³⁹ The peasantry thus embodied the national essence through its instincts and vital impulses and owed nothing to modernity. On the contrary, its premodern character preserved those traits of the national psyche that were absent among the country's elites and that defined an ideal community. The state and its institutions were but an awkward construction erected upon the living body of the people that searched in vain for a preexisting unity.

However, Frunză's position cannot be reduced to anarchist and anti-state rhetoric. The last part of his text discussing the pragmatic dimension of Romania's war policy represents a *realpolitik* approach. The author's argument for adopting a pro-German orientation contains two premises. The first derives from an ostensibly objective analysis of the military situation on the Eastern Front. Like his colleagues grouped around Stere, Frunză argues that the Russian army's heavy losses and the advance of

¹³⁵ Ibid., 60.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 62.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 65.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 74.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 76.

Habsburg troops during the 1915 Galician offensive had doomed Russia's war effort. Consequently, any alliance with the "northern colossus" would be not only futile, but also harmful for the Romanian Kingdom.¹⁴⁰ What is more important in his scheme is the myth of Russian expansionism, which Frunză fully exploits. In addition to introducing the discredited but still ideologically effective theme of the fictitious "testament of Peter I," the Bessarabian-born anarchist constructs his argument on two rhetorical pillars. First, he attempts to impress his readers by arguing that an Entente victory would be incompatible with the continued existence of the Romanian state. This conclusion stemmed both from Russia's particular war aims and from the general condemnation of the "unnatural" alliance between the Western European powers and the Russian Empire. Germany appears in his theory as the only power capable of making "supreme sacrifices" to achieve its war objectives since the Entente was driven by mercantile and cynical strategic calculations. Frunză does not hesitate to use rather strong language when comparing the two alliances: "Will the war be won by narrow and petty egoism, anarchy, hysteria, drunkenness, ignorance, and thievery? Or will it be won by strictly following prescribed rules, iron discipline, will, bravery, and the almighty power of science?"¹⁴¹

Frunză states even more ominously that a Russian victory would spell the end of Romanian statehood and could possibly result in the disappearance of the nation itself, though on this last point he remains ambiguous. In any case, he unequivocally states that the Russian Empire had pursued a systematic and coordinated anti-Romanian policy: "With regard to us, Russia's constant goal has always been the complete conquest of our territory and the ethnic annihilation, without a trace, of this nation of 'Gypsies' that the Russians have always treated and continue to treat accordingly; also, the blind path of destiny and certain truly 'legitimate' aspirations drew all the movements of tsarism to pass . . . directly over our bodies."¹⁴² The author also anticipates the likely consequences for Romania upon joining the Entente. In Frunză's view, only somber perspectives for Romania's future are possible, regardless of whether the Russians are defeated or emerge victorious: "1. Defeated together with our Russian 'friends,' we will surely lose Moldavia at least to the Siret [River], *given to the Russians* as the sole consolation and 'compensation' allowed for the defeated 'colossus.' 2. Victorious together with our Russian 'friends,' we will surely lose Moldavia at least to the Milcov [the border with Wallachia], the mouths of the Danube, and all of Dobrogea."¹⁴³ This apocalyptic image of territorial losses,

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 106.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 81.

¹⁴² Ibid., 92–93.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 119. Italics and quotation marks in original.

reinforced by a similarly pessimistic image of the preservation of internal autonomy, could only lead to "us being wiped from the ranks of states, in order to wipe us out as a people as well."¹⁴⁴ The Russian Empire thus appears in Frunză's writing as a purely destructive and alien force with which no compromise can be reached.

Meanwhile, the supposed incompatibility of Russian and Romanian interests is reinforced by Frunză's virulent criticism of Russia's internal organization. Like all empires, Russia simultaneously represented a mortal danger to its neighbors and a "colossus with clay feet," which was in an advanced state of decay.¹⁴⁵ This contradiction was present in all the writings of the Germanophiles, and consequently, it was one of the points most frequently attacked by adversaries. The substance of Frunză's argument follows the traditional pattern of presenting Russia as an unreformed, oriental, and despotic empire based on savage repression and the suppression of all opposition. Frunză's radical populist background prompts him to postulate the existence of two starkly opposed Russias: the Russia of political prisoners and exiles inhabited by "uncured idealists," and its quintessential opposite—official Russia, whose origins could be traced to the imperial legacies bequeathed by the Scandinavian, Byzantine, and Tatar traditions of statehood. All of these elements were incompatible with modern civilization and transformed the tsarist empire into a dangerous anachronism.¹⁴⁶ In his polemical fervor, Frunză ascribes the few elements of superficial Westernization in the Russian Empire to German influence, which was being destroyed by the tsarist regime following the outbreak of the war.¹⁴⁷ Without developing this point further, he clearly hints at a civilization-based hierarchy in which Russia hardly features.

A final aspect of Frunză's argument concerns the reasons that made Bessarabia's integration into the Kingdom preferable to Transylvania's. Using an idea that would be invoked repeatedly by other pro-German authors, Frunză insists that Bessarabian Romanians are much more endangered by the unfavorable conditions of their ethnic and cultural environment. Despite their ethnic vitality that he continuously emphasizes, their reintegration into the Kingdom would represent an "act of justice" and "compensation" for the heroic, but wordless struggle of the eastern "marches" of the Romanian nation.¹⁴⁸ Whereas the Transylvanians were privileged due to their permanent contact with the West and the existence of an active national and cultural movement, the Bessarabians did not have

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 83.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 89–90.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 88.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 108–11.

any means to defend their interests within the Russian Empire. Frunză also sketches the argument (later developed by Stere) referring to the legal right of Bessarabians to be included in the Romanian state due to their direct contribution to Romanian nation-building. Moreover, the Bessarabian direction of national consolidation was the only conceivable option for Frunză, who did not doubt an imminent German victory at the time. He vehemently protests against the warnings of his opponents about the possible future complications for Russian-Romanian relations that Bessarabia's occupation might produce.¹⁴⁹ Frunză's pro-German stance culminates in the introductory and concluding sections of his work where he praises the German army as the only "savior" of the Romanian people.¹⁵⁰ He argues that the Romanian Kingdom was the only European state that had legitimate reasons to enter the war, especially since its fight would represent the "*two great causes* that still have not been and should never be forgotten: the first is *the cause of civilization* threatened by the Byzantine-Tatar state of the tsars; the second is the cause of our own existence as a state and as a nation."¹⁵¹ The idea of Romania as the vanguard of civilization in the East responsible for resisting Russian expansion structured his worldview. His combination of nationalism with democratic and leftist social agendas was thus far from marginal in the prewar Romanian context.¹⁵² Though the importance of such figures should not be exaggerated, Frunză's peculiar amalgam of organic nationalism and powerful social criticism makes his work one of the most original Bessarabian contributions to the polemics surrounding Romania's place in the war.

The "Bessarabian question" was debated in contemporary literature mainly from three interrelated perspectives, which may be grouped into the following categories: economic, geopolitical, and national. The economic argument emphasized the commercial and practical importance of acquiring Bessarabia for Romania's position on the Black Sea. In this sense, direct competition with the Russian Empire in the sphere of grain and oil exports was one of the most effective rhetorical devices. Russia appeared as Romania's chief competitor for these raw materials on the Western European market. Consequently, the weakening of Russia's position on the

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 84, 104. In his writings, Frunză repeatedly reacts to the idea of Bessarabia as a "second Alsace" between Romania and Russia.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 4, 118, 121. The German general von Hindenburg appears as the embodiment of all hope for the retrieval of Bessarabia. In his preface, Frunză refers to Hindenburg as a "God [who] will soon save us from the alliance with Holy Russia and [who] will return to us—if we want it—our poor Bessarabia." See *ibid.*, 4.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 122. Italics in original.

¹⁵² In the interwar period, Frunză radicalized his political views and became a Communist Party sympathizer. See Colesnic, *Basarabia necunoscută*, 15.

Black Sea and its removal from the mouths of a Romanian-controlled Danube could be achieved through Bessarabia's integration into the Kingdom.

The second, geopolitical component of the Bessarabian nexus concerned Russia's aim to wrest control of the Dardanelles and Constantinople. In addition to the Romanian establishment's traditional concerns, this fear was magnified in the initial period of World War I due to information about secret Anglo-French-Russian negotiations regarding the postwar settlement and mutual compensation for the Allied powers. The apparent readiness of the French and British governments to recognize the primacy of Russian interests in the Straits, coupled with the declarations of high-ranking imperial officials hinting at the public pressure to expand to the south, were cited as proof of the impending danger of a Russian victory for Romania's future. This geopolitical vision was also built on the "greatest relative danger" principle through which the Romanov Empire represented the greater threat compared to the Austro-Hungarian and German monarchies. Pro-German authors contended that neither of the Central Powers was interested in weakening Romania. Russia, on the other hand, purportedly viewed Romania as an obstacle to the fulfillment of its fundamental interests.

The third dimension of the "Bessarabian question" referred to national priorities. The pro-Entente faction insisted on Transylvania's greater importance for the fulfillment of the national ideal. The symbolic competition over the incorporation of the two provinces into the imagined fatherland left the Bessarabian faction in the minority. Its representatives sought to counter the marginalization of Bessarabia by invoking the integrity of the national territory as the only possible premise of a viable foreign policy. As the case of Constantin Stere has shown, this competition also witnessed the clash of two opposing visions of Romanian nationalism.

The pro-Bessarabian faction was in fact a loose association of very different political figures united exclusively by their foreign policy preferences. Thus, the core of this community consisted of the "old" leaders of the Conservative Party (P. P. Carp and Titu Maiorescu) and the group led by Constantin Stere, which included most of the Bessarabian émigrés based in the Kingdom. Most of the pro-Bessarabian faction's writings were published under the aegis of the League for Bessarabia's Liberation, which acted as a coordinating center for the promotion of the "Bessarabian question" in the public sphere. Another publishing avenue was the *Minerva* newspaper, which was apparently financed by the German Embassy. Most of the written output of these publishers consisted of short brochures propagating either staunch neutrality or an immediate alliance with the Central Powers.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ Some examples of pragmatic works advocating an unequivocal alliance with Germany against Russia and insisting on Bessarabia's annexation are the follow-

One typical example of such a publication combined an economic explanation for the causes of the war with a nationally inspired argument. From the outset, the author proclaims that “the war began and is waged currently for the economic domination of the world.”¹⁵⁴ Accordingly, the framing of the confrontation in terms of the principle of national self-determination is hypocritical. From an economic point of view, the author argues, Romania “needs complete freedom of navigation on the Danube and complete freedom of the mouths of the Danube.”¹⁵⁵ Both of these aims, as well as the necessity of free and open trade on the Black Sea, were endangered by the Russian Empire’s expansionist plans in the Balkans and in the Dardanelles. In a curious parallel to the widespread assumptions about Russia’s drive toward the warm seas, the anonymous writer perceives Romania’s direct contact with the sea as a fundamental precondition for its further development: “A sea outlet is a condition for the life of any state, and in this war—which will undoubtedly bring significant changes to the map of Europe—Romania has the duty to guarantee, first and foremost, that this outlet to the sea is neither closed nor in any way hindered for her.”¹⁵⁶ The author even emphasizes the primacy of economic and geopolitical considerations over the national question by asserting that “even if it [Bessarabia] had not been Romanian, even if it had not been a part of our body, we should still be ready to accept all the necessary sacrifices in order to have it.”¹⁵⁷

Nevertheless, an appeal to the national sentiments of the target audience is developed in the second half of the brochure. The implicit comparison with the plight of the Transylvanian Romanians is the most salient rhetorical device at the author’s disposal. Bessarabia thus appears as the most recently “stolen” and the most threatened Romanian province.¹⁵⁸ The

ing: Historicus, *De ce ne trebuie Basarabia* [Why we need Bessarabia] (Bucharest: S.I., 1915); Ioan D. Filitti, *Politica externă a României și atitudinea ei în conflictul european* [Romania’s foreign policy and its attitude toward the European conflict] (Bucharest: Minerva, 1915); and Zamfir C. Arbore, *Liberarea Basarabiei* [Bessarabia’s liberation] (Bucharest: Editura Ligei pentru Liberarea Basarabiei, 1915). For a polemical response, see R. Dinu, *O replică la broșura “De ce ne trebuie Basarabia” de Historicus* [A reply to the brochure “Why we need Bessarabia” by Historicus] (Bucharest: Atelierele Grafice “Universala”, 1916). A more balanced approach reflecting the government’s policy of neutrality can be found in Vintilă I. Brătianu, *Pentru conștiința națională* [For national consciousness] (Bucharest: Flacăra, 1915).

¹⁵⁴ Historicus, *De ce ne trebuie Basarabia*, 11.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 12.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 16.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 25.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 29–32. This picture was reinforced by an overview of the various means the Russian authorities used to Russify the region.

author concludes that by "conquering Bessarabia, we will fulfill a part of our national ideal and we will, at the same time, secure our future and our freedom."¹⁵⁹ However, the issue of national priorities was the weakest link in the chain of arguments presented by the pro-Bessarabian faction. Bessarabia was on the losing side of the competition with Transylvania as the most likely and profitable direction for Romanian irredentism. Pro-Entente writers pointed to their ideological opponents' mistaken insistence on the opportunities offered by Bessarabia's inclusion into Romania, objecting that "we should first take care of that [province] which has suffered for a longer time in comparison with that which only now begins to feel the yoke. . . . Let us save first the land that time has forgotten in the hands of our enemies from the North before that [land] over which only a century of slavery has passed!"¹⁶⁰ A direct comparison with the situation in Transylvania or Bukovina rarely served the cause of the Germanophile group that advocated an anti-Russian orientation. Some publications printed by the League for the Liberation of Bessarabia represented classic examples of nationalist propaganda, replete with patriotic appeals to recover the "missing star" in the Romanian crown and emphasizing the historical continuity of the Romanian population in Bessarabia. Such publications carefully avoided the thorny issue of national priorities and did not dwell on the relative advantages of Romania's alliance with Germany, focusing instead on depicting the "brutal and inhuman" character of the Russian regime and representing Romania's involvement in the region as a mission of national salvation.¹⁶¹ The polemics over Romania's position in the war were not limited to pamphlets and crude nationalist propaganda, however. Indeed, more articulate strategies surfaced in contemporary political debates. One of the central policy proposals was drafted by Constantin Stere, who became one of the leading critics of the majority pro-Entente position in 1915 and early 1916.

Stere's involvement in the controversy amounted to a three-stage process that began with the publication of a detailed outline of Romania's foreign policy in early 1915, followed by a series of parliamentary speeches in mid-December 1915, and culminating in an extensive commentary and rebuttal of the arguments of one of his chief opponents, Take Ionescu, that

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 34. To discredit his pro-Entente opponents, he cites an article written by one of the most outspoken representatives of the latter current, Take Ionescu, in which Ionescu argues for an anti-Russian foreign policy based on geopolitical considerations and the "natural and inexorable" rivalry between Romania and Russia. Russia thus appears as the "natural enemy" of the Romanian state.

¹⁶⁰ Dinu, *O replică la broșura "De ce ne trebuie Basarabia" de Historicus*, 12.

¹⁶¹ One of the more characteristic examples of such an approach is Gh. Dighiș, *Sub jug străin!...* [Under the foreign yoke!] (Bucharest: Tipografia Curții regale F. Goebel Fii, 1915), 48.

Stere printed in early 1916.¹⁶² Though the wider framework of Stere's nation-building project was not altered, the specific terms in which he articulated his foreign policy program bore the unmistakable imprint of the war. Despite his ideological bias, the eloquence of his arguments apparently left a lasting impression on his contemporaries. Among the numerous reactions to Stere's written and oral arguments, the testimony left by I. G. Duca—one of Stere's fellow party members who did not share the minority pro-German view—is revealing: "For those who might want to know, in the future, which arguments supported the beliefs of those who just before the beginning of the war for our national unity demanded that Romania should not leave the Central Powers and especially should not unite with Russia, as well as for all those who will hear the voice of Bessarabian woes or the cry of despair of the Romanianism from beyond the Prut, Stere's speech [on December 15 and 16, 1915] will undoubtedly remain [their] most complete, brightest, and most moving expression."¹⁶³

This impression of compelling argumentation owed as much to Stere's specific rhetorical strategy as to the substance of his analysis. The rhetorical dimension of his speeches and texts rests on two instances of classical *captatio benevolentiae*.¹⁶⁴ First, he positions himself as the legitimate representative of the inarticulate Bessarabian population, appealing to his impressed audience as the only "voice . . . which can reach [you] from a graveyard of two million Romanian souls."¹⁶⁵ This trans-personal dimension therefore allows him to go against the dominant current of public opinion and justify his pro-German orientation due to his better understanding of national priorities. It also demonstrates how the topic of Bessarabia's marginality within the mainstream national narrative could be manipulated in the sensitive context of war. In a somewhat paradoxical vein given his leftist social views, Stere argues that the "popular instinct," which he equates with public opinion, is not the best guiding principle for the formulation of the national interest. For the sake of his argument, Stere is even prepared to support the elitist view of politics that he otherwise rejects. In his opinion, "the national interest can be determined by the wise judgment of the statesman, by the cold and objective analysis of the circumstances, by the calculation of all chances of success, by the balanced assessment of all threats. Instinct,

¹⁶² Stere, *România și războiul european*; Stere and Carp, *Politica externă a României*; and Stere, *Discursul D-lui Take Ionescu*.

¹⁶³ I. G. Duca, *Amintiri politice* [Political memoirs], vol. 1, 215. Cited in Ioan Căpreanu, *Eseul unei redescoperiri: C. Stere* [The essay of a rediscovery: C. Stere] (Iași: Junimea, 1988), 257. See also Ornea, *Viața lui Constantin Stere*, vol. 2, 112.

¹⁶⁴ A rhetorical technique designed to obtain the sympathy of the audience or reader, usually at the beginning of a speech or text.

¹⁶⁵ Stere and Carp, *Politica externă a României*, 14–15.

however, is blind by definition and can often flow from passion and prejudice."¹⁶⁶ Thus, the national interest was purely a matter of individual "judgment and consciousness" and could not be left to the passions of wavering public opinion.¹⁶⁷ Stere's isolation within his contemporary political milieu could even be considered a virtue as long as the author assumed a self-consciously prophetic tone. Second, Stere argues that he in fact better represents the country's political tradition than his opponents who prefer a sudden change of policy instead of following the well-trodden path of aligning with the Central Powers. Stere bases his argument on the "founding event" of the Russian "felony" of 1878 and invokes the "founding fathers" of modern Romania as the true representatives of the now distorted national interest. He insists that he is in line with the majority of the country's leaders advocating rapprochement with Germany in order to thwart Russia's ambitions in the region.¹⁶⁸

Stere's arguments, reiterated with only slight changes of emphasis during this polemical phase of his political career, could be grouped into several categories that structured his platform: 1) the geopolitical dimension that emphasized the direct interest of the Russian Empire in the destruction of the Romanian state due to Russia's irrepressible drive toward the south; 2) the national dimension, which emphasized the priority of national consolidation based on the concept of the integral national ideal (i.e., an organic image of the nation that could not set any priorities for national unity without being seriously endangered in the process); 3) the less important economic dimension that featured the familiar theme of economic competition over the export of raw materials; 4) the civilizational dimension, which constructed an irreconcilable opposition between Russia as the embodiment of Oriental despotism and Germany as the representative of European civilization both politically and culturally; and 5) the pragmatic dimension focusing on Romania's relative gains in the case of a Russian or German military victory.

Indeed, the author starts invoking exactly this last argument about the relative benefits of either outcome when he asserts that "in the fight for supremacy in the Balkans, between the Central Powers on the one hand and the Russian Empire on the other hand, our future as a state and as a

¹⁶⁶ Stere, *Discursul D-lui Take Ionescu*, 26. See also Stere, *România și războiul european*, 1–2.

¹⁶⁷ Stere, *Discursul D-lui Take Ionescu*, 26. This position was rather close to the staunchly anti-democratic bias of Stere's "fellow-traveler," P. P. Carp, who dismissed public opinion as irrelevant and even harmful for political decision-making. See Stere and Carp, *Politica externă a României*, 9.

¹⁶⁸ Stere, *România și războiul european*, 3–4; Stere and Carp, *Politica externă a României*, 45–46; and Stere, *Discursul D-lui Take Ionescu*, 28.

nation is threatened . . . much less by the Central Powers than by Russia.”¹⁶⁹ Stere bases his opinion on Russia’s geopolitical obsession with the Balkan region and Constantinople. The difference in Stere’s approach is the more substantial evidence that he provides in favor of his thesis. Both in his general brochure and in his speech, he analyzes the book of the late L. A. Kasso, which he presents as one of the most convincing examples of Russia’s unrelenting “drive to the South.”¹⁷⁰ To reinforce his point, the author makes a distinction between the purely intellectual idea of pan-Slavism and the “pan-Muscovite” projects that aimed to “swallow” Romania along with the southern Slavs. Using the example of the Poles and the Ukrainians, Stere concludes that “pan-Russianism was thus born through the drowning of the Slavs.”¹⁷¹ The logic of anti-Russian sentiment prompts Stere to anticipate a similar situation for Romanians in the case of a Russian victory. Any expansion of the Romanian state to the west would be rendered useless by the unfavorable strategic position that it would acquire, since “the *minimal* result of Russia’s victory” would mean “the annexation of Galicia by Russia, the annexation of Constantinople and the Straits, the transformation of the Slavic states of the Balkans into a simple *Rücken-deckung*.”¹⁷²

One of the most salient tropes that Stere uses to depict the catastrophic consequences of a Russian victory is the “common yoke” that Kingdom and Transylvanian Romanians would suffer under Russian domination. Instead of fulfilling the country’s national ideal, Stere argues, Romanian leaders were in fact unwittingly preparing the ground for the common grave of the Romanian people.¹⁷³ The logical continuation of this view could only be a counterpoint to the negative picture of the Russian Empire in the form of a positive assessment of the civilizing mission of the Habs-

¹⁶⁹ Stere, *România și războiul european*, 4.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 11–13; Stere and Carp, *Politica externă a României*, 33–35.

¹⁷¹ Stere and Carp, *Politica externă a României*, 38.

¹⁷² Stere, *România și războiul european*, 14. In a similar summary of his thesis, Stere asserts: “In the case of a Russian victory, we must give up forever the two million souls from Bessarabia, and we are at least condemned to become a Russian enclave, to fall into de facto vassalage to the mighty empire, which will hold under its dominion the keys of the Black Sea and will also dominate the Balkans. This, I repeat, is the *minimal* evil that awaits us!” Ibid, 16.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 16–17: “The vassalage under Russia will create . . . for the Romanians of Bukovina and Transylvania . . . a more terrible yoke than that under which they suffer today. We would only find the consolation of a common grave for the dispersed branches of this people.” See also Stere and Carp, *Politica externă a României*, 40: “You will be able . . . to destroy the border pillars between us and Transylvania—but only for us to come under a common yoke, more terrible than the Hungarian one, and to have instead of a national life a common grave.”

burg Empire. The Russian-Habsburg rivalry was necessary both in order to legitimize Bessarabia's privileged place in the hierarchy of national redemption and to highlight Austria's role in blocking the advance of dangerous forces from the East. Thus, not only did the Habsburgs provide all the conditions for the emergence of an educated elite and for the conduct of a vigorous national struggle, but they also represented a "shield against the conquest and annihilation [of small peoples] by the despotisms of the Orient."¹⁷⁴ Stere also counters the arguments of his opponents about the alternative danger of Austro-Hungarian annexation by arguing that not only was such a scenario improbable, but it would also be dangerous for the internal balance of the monarchy since the inclusion of "fourteen million Romanians" would either radically alter the fragile ethnic structure of the empire or lead to the eventual dissolution of Austria-Hungary.¹⁷⁵ The question of relative danger was thus clear in Stere's mind. The logic underpinning the exaggerated Russian threat was rejected by the pro-Entente faction on the basis of the contradiction between its image as a backward and decaying regime and the cliché of "the Northern Colossus" that Stere abused for polemical purposes. In his rebuttal, the author objects, first, that he adopted a comparative perspective (i.e., the Russian threat was greater than the German or Austrian one, which did not invalidate the fact of Russia's military weakness), and, second, that a Russian victory depended on the forces involved in the hostilities.¹⁷⁶

Stere's notion of the integral national ideal can only be understood within the framework of his concept of the nation as a "living body" whose "signs of health . . . are confirmed by the energy with which it reacts every time its integrity is damaged."¹⁷⁷ Russia represented such a danger not only because of its disproportionate military might and expansionist tendencies, but most of all due to its political backwardness and civilizational inferiority in comparison with Germany. In order to build this scheme of political and cultural antagonism, Stere performs the complicated operation of dissociating Russia from its Western European allies. He achieves this by asserting that the only significance of an Entente victory for Romania would be the consolidation of Russian hegemony on the European continent, while the war aims of the Western Allies were irrelevant for the country's immediate

¹⁷⁴ Stere, *Discursul D-lui Take Ionescu*, 24.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 45–46. The implicit contradiction, of course, remains unaddressed.

¹⁷⁷ Stere, *România și războiul european*, 17. In another work, he introduces the notion of a "Romanian Piedmont," defining the Romanian Kingdom as "the territory of consolidation. Only from here can the evolution begin that will lead to the merging of the ethnic notion of Romanianism with the political notion of the Romanian state." Stere, *Marele războiu și politica României*, 120.

interests. Stere thus implicitly assumes that the war was essentially a clash between Russia and Germany. In simplifying the terms of the military and political equation, Stere presents the Russian polity as “the only state in Europe that does not rely upon a legal order—a ‘police state,’ not a *Rechtsstaat*.”¹⁷⁸

The author also rejects his political opponent Take Ionescu’s insistence on the normalization of Russian political order. Ionescu in fact followed a growing current of opinion across the continent that regarded the Russian political system in more favorable terms, drawing parallels between the “old regime” in Russia and its more Westernized, but similar variants in Germany and Austria-Hungary. This view was anathema to Stere, who contrasted the federal structure and the extensive civil and political rights of the Central European monarchies with the outdated and unreformed Russian autocracy.¹⁷⁹ Beyond the political sphere, Russia also constituted a dangerous “other” for European civilization. Stere challenges the idea of Russia as a European power, highlighting its superficial internalization of Western values and its insecure status between Europe and Asia: “[How can] Russia, which had lived until Peter the Great outside the sphere of European civilization, and since then, for merely two hundred years, can barely crawl along the path tread by more advanced countries, be considered as the representative of civilization in a conflict with Germany?”¹⁸⁰ The Asiatic nature of the Russian state, which Stere carefully distinguishes from Russian society as a whole, is reinforced by a direct parallel that he draws between the Russo-German conflict and the Greco-Persian wars of antiquity: “The fight between Russia and Germany constitutes, in reality, a new form of the fight that Ancient Greece once waged against the empire of the Persians. It is the fight between two visions of social and political life. Germany represents in this fight the common foundation upon which the political and social edifice of civilized humanity has been erected, whereas Russia represents the final assault of Oriental despotism.”¹⁸¹

Such Orientalist overtones were certainly part of the mechanism refined during the mutually subversive war propaganda campaigns, but they also fit

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 21. He also speaks about “the [political] abyss that separates the empire of the tsars from the rest of Europe,” in Stere and Carp, *Politica externă a României*, 17. Stere also uses the concept of a “Ukrainian Piedmont” in reference to Galicia, borrowing it from a wartime Ukrainian manifesto. See Stere, *Discursul D-lui Take Ionescu*, 23.

¹⁷⁹ Stere, *Discursul D-lui Take Ionescu*, 17–19.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 16.

¹⁸¹ Stere, *România și războiul European*, 22. Stere also makes a distinction between the personal qualities of the leaders of despotic states and their irrelevance for the overall character of the regime, again citing the example of Persia’s Darius I. See Stere, *Discursul D-lui Take Ionescu*, 18.

neatly into the Romanian image of the Russian Other. Accordingly, Stere portrays Germany in direct opposition to Russia's backwardness and arbitrariness. The resulting picture of discipline, cultural achievement, and intellectual effervescence serves as the pretext for Stere's direct comparison between the two empires that places the Romanov polity on the wrong side of the civilizational divide.¹⁸² Not content with simply extolling German intelligence and economic prosperity, Stere insists on the "foundational character" of the German ethnicity as an initial and necessary condition for the emergence of European civilization. In his words, "when, through the exhaustion of vital forces, the Western Roman Empire died, there was one last region in Northern Europe that had not been conquered by the Roman armies. From there, a Barbarian current, healthy and potentially rich, emerged. . . . Only the Germanic race thus secured for us the transmission of the elements of ancient civilization and facilitated their assimilation."¹⁸³ Stere's eloquent public position represented the most robust example of the pro-German orientation within the Romanian political establishment. On the one hand, it perpetuated the persistent anti-Russian clichés of prewar Romanian national discourse and reflected Stere's overall concept of the nation. On the other hand, the impact of the war generated pragmatic arguments that attempted to assess Romania's strategic dilemmas in early 1916.

A final aspect of the "Bessarabian question" in the context of World War I concerns its international implications. Bessarabia did not feature among the important points on the agenda of the belligerent powers. This was especially true during the first two years of the war when Romania's neutrality precluded the formulation of specific plans for the province's future. However, Bessarabia did occasionally surface in contemporary debates either as a potential base for military operations against Russia or as one of the national peripheries whose emancipation might be of interest to Russia's adversaries. The first possibility was envisaged not only by Romania's pro-German circles, but also by anti-Russian émigré organizations. Ukrainian anti-Russian émigrés were particularly active in Romania during the period of neutrality and came into direct contact with pro-German activists grouped around the Bessarabian community in Bucharest. The Union for the Liberation of Ukraine (ULU), created in Lviv in August 1914 with the aim of seizing control of Russian Ukraine with the assistance of the Central Powers, soon extended its operations to Romania. After the Russian occupation of Galicia in the fall of 1914, this organization, which

¹⁸² Stere, *Discursul D-lui Take Ionescu*, 13–15.

¹⁸³ Stere and Carp, *Politică externă a României*, 50–51. Stere ends his speech by repeatedly invoking the threat of "Cossack dominance" and the "Orthodox hordes" (*hoardele pravoslavnice*). *Ibid.*, 52.

consisted of prominent Ukrainian nationalists from both the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires, moved its headquarters to Vienna and effectively relaunched its propaganda campaign abroad, conducting its activities through its two main bases in Bucharest and Constantinople.

In September 1914, the Bucharest branch of the ULU was instrumental in distributing its first *Manifesto*, which called for the Ukrainian and Romanian peoples' joint struggle against the Russian autocracy. The memorandum began with an "Appeal to the Romanian People" and was prefaced by the notorious left-wing Bessarabian émigré, Zamfir C. Arbore. This was not surprising given the social-democratic political orientation of most ULU members and Arbore's links to revolutionary circles in the Russian Empire.¹⁸⁴ One of the most interesting cases in this respect concerns Ukrainian groups operating in the Ottoman Empire during the first half of the war. The Constantinople branch of the ULU envisaged a joint military operation consisting of Ottoman forces and Ukrainian volunteer detachments that would land simultaneously near Odessa and in the Kuban region in hopes of inciting a revolt among the local populations.¹⁸⁵ Although these plans never came to fruition, an abortive operation of much smaller proportions took place in early December 1914. The original plan proposed sending twenty-four Ottoman cavalymen to Southern Bessarabia (near Akkerman) who would then reach Romania after destroying Russian infrastructure in Bessarabia. The actual landing took place on Serpent Island at the mouth of the Danube and was unsuccessful after Russian forces immediately captured the detachment.¹⁸⁶ Bessarabia's military vulnerability thus drew the attention of the belligerent powers only to a limited extent.

However, the mutual propaganda war did leave an important testimony related to Bessarabia. The document in question is a memorandum drafted by the well-known Bessarabian writer and journalist Alexis Nour, who was involved in publishing the first Romanian-language newspaper in Bessarabia during 1906–7 and was also the editor of the moderate Kadet-oriented¹⁸⁷ daily *Bessarabskaia zhizn'* since 1903. He moved to Romania after 1912 and became associated with Stere's circle in Iași. Before discussing the relevance of this memorandum for the specific wartime context in

¹⁸⁴ Pavel, *Între Rusia țarilor și Germania Wilhelmiană: Un memoriu basarabean din 1916*, 60, 99.

¹⁸⁵ Hakan Kirmli, "The Activities of the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War," *Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 4 (October 1998): 177–200. On the role of the Ukrainian factor in the Russian-Ottoman rivalry during World War I, see also the excellent book by Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908–1918* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 133–34.

¹⁸⁶ Kirmli, "The Activities of the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine," 190.

¹⁸⁷ The term refers to the Russian Constitutional-Democratic (Kadet) party.

Bessarabia, its wider implications should be examined. Nour's memorandum is a striking example of the mutually subversive propaganda that empires employed in order to undermine the internal stability of their rivals. Therefore, the theory of imperial adversaries abandoning rational behavior during World War I also applies to the Bessarabian case. The extent to which the Triple Entente and the Central Powers used secret services and their diplomatic missions in neutral countries for espionage and propaganda purposes was unprecedented.¹⁸⁸ The national question, which was particularly salient in the multiethnic Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires, was predictably exploited by imperial rivals to destabilize their enemies' war efforts.

The same logic operated on the Russian-German diplomatic front. Germany's ostensible war goals, including the eventual creation of a series of buffer states in the Russian Empire's Western Borderlands, entailed the elaboration of detailed plans for fomenting internal rebellion among Russia's ethnic groups. One of the earliest and most comprehensive plans was devised by the Finnish-born and German-educated lawyer Fredrik Wetterhoff. As early as June 1915, Wetterhoff presented his proposal to the German Foreign Ministry and General Staff. According to his plan, a simultaneous uprising in the Baltic Provinces and the Caucasus, if well coordinated, could lead to an armed insurrection in Ukraine and eventually to revolutionary upheaval across the Russian Empire. The author insists that "assisting the liberation struggle of these peoples is . . . much more important than gaining the alliance of a certain state, like, for instance, Romania, through which Russia's power will certainly be weakened, but will never be completely destroyed."¹⁸⁹

The relationship between disgruntled national activists who had emigrated from the Russian Empire after 1914 and Germany's military and diplomatic institutions supervising the anti-Russian propaganda campaign was ambiguous. Most of these émigrés (with the partial exception of the Poles) were ready to profit from the support of the German Empire and thus developed an advantageous relationship with the authorities in Berlin who provided the resources for various publishing and institutional projects. Such was the case of the so-called League of the Alien Peoples of Russia (*Liga der Fremdvölker Rußlands*), which was created in April 1916 and operated from two main bases in Switzerland and Sweden. This organization, which adopted an anti-Russian, nationalist orientation,

¹⁸⁸ For the Russian case, see J. F. N. Bradley, "The Russian Secret Service in the First World War," *Soviet Studies* 20, no. 2 (October 1968): 242–48.

¹⁸⁹ Pavel, *Între Rusia țarilor și Germania Wilhelmiană*, 91. For a general overview of Germany's espionage activities and propaganda campaign against Russia, see Pavel, 85–93.

emerged as a result of the fusion of the earlier Union of Nationalities led by the notorious Lithuanian journalist and writer Juozas Gabrys, and a smaller émigré group headed by the Baltic German Baron Friedrich von Ropp. It was supported and funded by the German Foreign Ministry and became one of the centers of anti-Russian propaganda.¹⁹⁰ The League was actually a network of individuals rather than a full-fledged organization with a clear agenda. Its most noteworthy achievement was the organization of the June 1916 Lausanne Nationalities Conference, which brought together representatives of the Finnish, Lithuanian, Baltic German, Ukrainian, Polish, and other émigré groups in a common forum intended to weaken Russia by coordinating their nationalist aspirations. The League's activities were short-lived and peaked with an appeal to U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, calling for the liberation of Russia's oppressed peoples. The actual impact of the League's activities was minimal because its members had little influence and few contacts in their homelands.¹⁹¹

The immediate impulse for Alexis Nour's memorandum came from a manifesto issued by the League in March 1916 that called for the publication of a collective volume on the national question in Russia that would include a presentation of the major nationalities of the Romanov Empire in comparative perspective. The planned volume was to be published in all major international languages and distributed in the capitals of the combatant powers. Ostensibly devoted to the goal of informing the European public about the plight of non-Russian ethnic groups in the Romanov Empire, the publication displayed a thinly veiled pro-German tendency that was camouflaged by its initial publication in Swedish and then by its "translation" into German and French.¹⁹² Nour's memorandum was included as one of the chapters of this collective work, which succeeded in putting Bessarabia on the map of wartime polemics.

The German ambassador to Romania sent the memorandum dated May 15, 1916, to the German chancellor a month later.¹⁹³ The significance of this document stems from two factors. First, it is an exceptional example

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 100–102. This organization included a number of Baltic Germans, Finns, Ukrainians, Poles, Jews, Georgians, and Tatars.

¹⁹¹ For the most comprehensive study of the League, see Seppo Zetterberg, *Die Liga der Fremdvölker Russlands 1916–1918: Ein Beitrag zu Deutschlands antirussischen Propagandakrieg unter den fremdvölkern Russlands im ersten Weltkrieg* (Helsinki: Studia Historica, 1978).

¹⁹² For details, see Pavel, *Între Rusia țărilor și Germania Wilhelmiană*, 109–19. The trajectory of this volume is interesting insofar as its French-language version (significantly abridged and modified to eliminate passages with pro-German tendencies) was used as one of the documentary sources at the Peace Conference, including on the "Bessarabian question."

¹⁹³ Ibid., 185–86.

of the internationalization of the "Bessarabian question" before the fall of the Russian imperial regime. After 1917, Bessarabia received greater international attention due to the Soviet-Romanian territorial controversy. However, the 1916 memorandum was the precedent that pointed to Bessarabia as one of the contested peripheries of the Russian Empire. Second, it is one of the few visions of Bessarabia's future within the context of the war that goes beyond the narrow Romanian context. One should analyze Nour's memorandum within the framework of the controversy over restructuring the empire on a federal basis. Yet, Nour intended his text to be an ideological appeal for a Romanian-Ukrainian alliance against the Russian imperial regime. This, of course, depended on long-term German military hegemony in the region, which still appeared rather plausible in the spring of 1916. It was also predicated upon Romania's alliance with the Central Powers, a possibility that was not ruled out until the late summer of 1916. Nour's position on the question of federalism as a possible alternative to the unitary structure of the Russian empire is even more ambiguous. The federalist option was rather popular among the majority of the politically active Bessarabians who were mostly affiliated with the Russian Left. This became clear during 1917 when the Romanian national option was in the minority and was not taken seriously until the collapse of the local authorities in Bessarabia in January 1918. Federalism also had its supporters in Romania, especially within the group of pro-German intellectuals around Stere.¹⁹⁴ Nour, however, rejected this option completely, believing that the collapse of the Russian Empire was imminent and that the only conceivable future for its nationalities would be the creation of a number of allied independent states. In the specific case of Bessarabia, only unification with Romania would be a lasting solution.¹⁹⁵

The 1916 memorandum was essentially a product of the war context and appeared as a result of the combination of external pressures and internal polemics. In the text, Nour emphasizes the strategic importance of Bessarabia for Romanian nation-building, noting that this region "secured

¹⁹⁴ "Federalism" could of course be understood in very different ways. Such views ranged from the "Great Austrian" doctrine propagated by the Transylvanian Aurel C. Popovici (who envisaged the transformation of the Habsburg Monarchy into a federation along national lines), to the much looser conception of a "Danubian Confederation" with the Monarchy favored, at one point, by Stere himself.

¹⁹⁵ In a series of articles published in Stere's journal, *Viața Românească*, in 1915, Nour insists on the necessity of an "alliance" with the Polish, Jewish, and Ukrainian national movements. He also rejects the persistent accusation of Bessarabia's transformation into an "Alsace-Lorraine" in Russian-Romanian relations, arguing for the legitimacy of the "right to national self-determination." See Pavel, *Între Rusia țarilor și Germania Wilhelmiană*, 71–78.

our [Romanian] future on the Black Sea.”¹⁹⁶ Following the tradition of his nationalist predecessors, he also laments the ignorance of Bessarabian affairs among the Romanian educated public, highlighting the absence of any active symbolic opposition to the 1912 celebration. More significantly, he compares the silence surrounding the events of 1912 with the much more vigorous reaction to a similar ceremony held by the Austrian authorities in Bukovina. The author remarks that in 1912 the Bessarabians “were not meant to be in Bukovina’s situation of 1875. . . . We, Bessarabians ourselves, could not produce any protest. Why was that? I have already shown this: there was no one to produce it, no one could or knew how to do it!”¹⁹⁷ Nour thus became one of the more prominent writers on the national question in Bessarabia after 1912. Though intended for a foreign audience, the 1916 memorandum can also be regarded as a synthetic expression of an emerging group of Bessarabian politicians who chose nationalism rather than social reform or federalism as their political credo.

The memorandum consists of nine chapters that address various aspects of Bessarabia’s geography, ancient and modern history, ethnographic composition, economic situation, political problems, as well as the prospects for the province’s future after the war. The text is partly a narrative presentation of the essential data on the province and partly a policy paper outlining the author’s vision of Bessarabia’s situation in the Russian Empire and Bessarabia’s relationship to a reformed Russian state. The narrative chapters also contain a significant comparative dimension that puts the province’s evolution under Russian rule in the context of the policies of neighboring empires and other non-Russian peripheries of the Romanov Empire. The final part of the memorandum is devoted to Bessarabia’s future in the postwar context. Recognizing the usefulness of Russian high culture for the emergence of a well-educated local intelligentsia, Nour advocates a parting of ways with the Russian heartland during the forthcoming social upheaval. He bases his argument on the priority of national tasks that required concentrating on the national self instead of participating in the reconstruction of a federal Russian state whose governing principles on the national question would be indistinguishable from those of the autocracy.

The distinguishing feature of the 1916 memorandum is the highly pragmatic character of the argument and the policy proposals Nour advances. In all likelihood, this was as much a conscious authorial choice as it

¹⁹⁶ Alexis Nour, “Alsacia-Lorena’ româno-rusă” [The Romanian-Russian “Alsace-Lorraine”], *Viața Românească* 10, no. 4 (April 1915): 117.

¹⁹⁷ Alexis Nour, “Scrisori din Basarabia: Basarabia de la 1912 încoace” [Letters from Bessarabia: Bessarabia since 1912], *Viața Românească* 9, nos. 7–9 (July–September 1914): 265.

was a necessary adaptation to the restrictions of war. The populist overtones that one would expect given the intellectual environment in which the memorandum emerged are not entirely absent; for example, the urban-rural opposition and praise for the peasantry's ethnic vitality are recurring tropes. However, they are moderated both by the author's political preferences and by the document's immediate propaganda aims. The memorandum lost its immediate relevance following Romania's entry into the war in August 1916 on the side of the Entente. The "Bessarabian question" temporarily receded from public view, but it soon re-emerged in more dramatic circumstances. Reacting against the Russian imperial narrative, Nour's version of Bessarabian Romanian nationalism, though still marginal at the time of the text's publication, would prevail due to the complex linkage between war and revolution during late 1917 and early 1918.

In conclusion, this chapter has shown how a combination of internal developments in the Russian Empire and shifting international circumstances modified the terms of the symbolic competition over Bessarabia. The immediate prewar period witnessed the gradual transformation of this southwestern region of the Russian Empire into an insecure borderland, at least in the minds of imperial Russian bureaucrats. The declaration of war and the radical transformative policies of the government in Petrograd, though not greatly affecting Bessarabia, laid the grounds for the gradual politicization of the masses that would erupt in social upheaval and political clashes after the February Revolution of 1917. Bessarabia's status as a contested territory was also enhanced by Romanian polemics in 1914–16, which put the province on the intellectual map of the Kingdom with hitherto unknown urgency. Although Bessarabia's marginality within Romanian national discourse was not overcome, this region was openly represented as part of the hierarchy of national priorities. The most important result of the first two years of the war was Bessarabia's initially faltering, but then increasingly brutal and tumultuous entry into the world of violent change that would signal the advent of modernity to the region.

Conclusion

This book has aimed to trace how the region known since 1812 as Bessarabia became the object of rival territorial claims and symbolic appropriation by the Russian Empire and the Romanian nation-state between the 1860s and 1916. Far from representing a unique case of contestation between two state entities in Eurasia, Bessarabia shared many common experiences and patterns of imperial policy with the Russian Empire's other western borderlands. However, the territory's position within the Russian Empire was unique in the sense that it was claimed not by a rival empire or non-state national project, but by a recently formed nation-state that included it in the overall scheme of its nationalist rhetoric and aspirations. This book has argued that two coherent sets of representations—subsumed under the labels of “national” and “imperial” discourse—openly vied for the area's symbolic inclusion into two rival state-building projects and for the allegiance of its inhabitants. Nevertheless, Bessarabia occupied a profoundly ambiguous and problematic place within both narratives. While the Russian authorities increasingly viewed it as an insecure borderland, Romanian nation-builders treated it as a marginal issue within the priorities of national expansion and cultural unification. This monograph has attempted to present the convoluted dynamics of the conflicting but also complementary representations of Bessarabia in the Russian and Romanian contexts and to explain why all the conditions for the full emergence of the “Bessarabian question” on the map of international diplomacy in the interwar period were already apparent by 1917. The identity conflicts and the murky local politics of self-identification that characterize the contemporary Republic of Moldova, even if shaped primarily by Soviet and interwar Romanian policies and ideologies, can hardly be understood without delving deeper into the pre-World War I period. As noted in the introduction, this book is essentially a prehistory of the twentieth-century “Bessarabian question.” I sincerely hope that this intellectual and political prehistory can illuminate the enduring patterns of symbolic competition that still structure the opposing narratives of identity and political projects of current local elites despite the frequent and brutal regime changes of the twentieth century.

Bessarabia under Russian Imperial Rule: From an Exotic Province to a Contested Borderland

Bessarabia was the product of imperial policies and of the imperial imagination. Like other contemporary borderlands carved out *ex nihilo* (such as Galicia), this region sprung seemingly out of nowhere, recombining and reconstructing previous spatial arrangements in order to suit the aims of Russian imperial elites. In conjunction with the “invention” of Eastern Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Bessarabia first emerged under the Russian imperial gaze as an exotic, colorful, and strange land, bearing all the essential marks of Orientalist discourse. These qualities were only reinforced by the Ottoman legacy and by the kaleidoscopic ethnic composition of the land acquired in 1812. Russian observers, whether occasional travelers, dilettantes, or serious scholars increasingly interested in the area in the post-1812 decades, needed time to grasp the peculiarity of the new territory and to know and understand it in terms familiar to their peers and the educated public. Some of these observers viewed the land as purely Oriental, savage, and uncivilized, while others detected ambiguities that complicated this picture. Despite these nuances, the language of Orientalism prevailed during the first two decades after the province’s incorporation into the empire. Bessarabia was certainly different from the central *guberniias* in terms of natural landscape, climate, everyday life, ethnic makeup, and the cultural orientation of its small group of elites. Yet what was at stake was the exact nature of this difference and the province’s place within the patchwork of the empire.

Orientalism provided the most convenient code for deciphering Bessarabia’s peculiarity. It seemed logical to use this lens because of Russia’s recent expansion into the Black Sea steppe and its acquisition of Crimea (in the latter case, Orientalism mingled seamlessly with Hellenism), and all the more so since Bessarabia was initially perceived as a showcase province meant to attract the Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire. In this sense, Bessarabia was one of multiple “orients” that the Russian Empire acquired in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. Although hardly comparable to Crimea, the Caucasus, or Central Asia in terms of its significance for Russian Orientalism, Bessarabia was subjected to the same process of discursive aggregation, differentiation, and reification as the broader Orient in Western thought and its Russian derivative. In the initial period of Russian domination, travel and the direct observation of the province represented privileged forms of imperial control. The early stages of Bessarabia’s symbolic and institutional construction were inseparable from the succession of Russian dignitaries who visited the region and left an immediate impact upon its administrative structure and imagined place within the empire. Along with the travelogues left behind by imperial bureaucrats,

military officials, and scholars, these visits were part of the corpus of knowledge that the Russian Empire used to consolidate its control in the area.

However, Bessarabia also represents a prime example of why Russian Orientalism was inherently ambiguous. Even during the heyday of Russian Orientalism, Bessarabia's position on the mental map of the empire was a matter of contention. In fact, Larry Wolff's broader metaphor of "in-betweenness"—a transitional zone of uncertainty and ambivalence that he applies to the construction of Eastern Europe as a whole—quite aptly describes the Bessarabian case within Russia. This region was just such a "demi-Oriental," transitional space between the empire's Western Borderlands and the southern steppe, belonging to both simultaneously. At least, this is what early Russian administrators seemed to think, for they were initially at a loss when it came to developing appropriate policies. Bessarabia's status thus oscillated between a model province for the Balkan peoples, a part of the Western Borderlands entitled to a greater degree of autonomy, and a space destined for colonization and settlement akin to the region of New Russia immediately to the east. This ambiguity both strengthened and undermined Orientalist themes depending on the observer's agenda and perception.

The basic dilemma that plagued imperial administrators in Eastern European borderlands was negotiating between the strategies of increased bureaucratic rationalization and temporary accommodation with traditional power structures at the local level. In broader terms, this meant choosing between a powerful transformative impulse, stemming from the self-perception of imperial elites as agents of civilization, order, and progress acting according to the Enlightenment idea of good governance, and a more conservative, gradualist approach favoring compromise with local elites and stressing the themes of tradition, social hierarchy, and historical rights. In the case of Bessarabia, the tension between the transformative and the accommodative approaches was characteristic of the first third of the nineteenth century when the region was sometimes viewed as a historical entity endowed with certain social structures and at other times viewed as empty space destined for intensive cultivation and colonization. This ambiguity derived not only from the attitude of imperial officials, but also from the province's earlier duality that imposed its constraints on Russian observers and bureaucrats. As for the evolution of imperial rule in Bessarabia, the prevalence of accommodative policies in the 1810s gradually gave way to the transformative approach of the 1820s. Therein lies the peculiarity of the Bessarabian case of provincial development in comparison with Habsburg policies in Galicia, where the attempt at radically reconstituting local society on a rational basis clearly predated the reliance on traditional institutions and elites. It also partly explains why the Polish elites of Galicia and

the Romanian elites of Bukovina were co-opted successfully by the Habsburg imperial center, serving as loyal intermediaries and agents for most of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Aside from the obvious institutional differences between the Austrian half of the Dual Monarchy and the late Romanov Empire, the change in Bessarabia's status from the center's perspective doomed any chance for a comparable scenario in Bessarabia.

The process of imperial integration and associated forms of imperial control were changing, uneven, and often haphazard. In the case of Bessarabia, the construction of cultural distance through the discourse of Orientalism gradually lost its relevance after the 1860s. Bessarabia's administrative assimilation, its transformation into a regular Russian *guberniia*, which took place during the second half of the nineteenth century and was all but completed by the 1870s, developed within the context generated by the sciences of territory and human populations and produced by the centralized, uniform, and ministerial model of imperial governance. This new model presupposed an abstract, neutral space of discrete objects to be perceived through elaborate techniques of representation. In this new space of abstractions, Bessarabia acquired its problematic status as a contested borderland and became an object of Russian-Romanian symbolic competition. However, the discourse of Orientalism did not disappear completely. It was reappropriated by Romanian national discourse, which redefined the region as an object of *internal Orientalism* within the imagined space of the Romanian national body.

Bessarabia as the Object of a "Triangular Relationship"

Both discursive traditions vying for the region were peripheral with respect to the Western master narratives of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This assertion does not postulate any normative model located in a reified West, but only highlights the peculiar mechanisms for constructing identity and otherness in Eastern Europe. In addition to the two direct protagonists involved in the controversy over Bessarabia, the eternally present Western point of reference influenced the terms of the debate. The Russian Empire constantly oscillated between an optimistic assessment of its civilizing mission in the borderlands and the defensive, anti-Western rhetoric of Russian uniqueness. This was valid not only for the Slavophile-Westernizer dispute, but also for the spatial representations of the empire's territory that pointed to the possible existence of a separate Russian world. I would argue, however, that these musings had as much to do with the terms of Russia's entry into the modern era as with the complete rejection of the Western model. Thus, the spatial consciousness of Russian intellectuals can be linked to their Romanian peers' thoughts on the new nation-

state's position on the mental map of Europe. This wider context determined the significance of border areas as fault lines where supposedly irreconcilable oppositions collided. The possibilities for framing this argument were numerous, ranging from an emphasis on cultural, civilizational, and moral hierarchies to the heightened intensity of ethnicist discourses where transborder communities were involved. The themes of threat and subversion in the borderlands were necessary both for imperial states, with their specific understanding of the shifting zones of mutual influence and struggle, and for nation-states that needed to define their ideal fatherlands in unambiguous terms (such an aspiration, however, was and remains utopian). Where two or more such narratives intersected, one can usually speak of a contested borderland.

Imperial bureaucrats perceived Bessarabia in these terms long before any local stirrings justified these concerns. The logic that determined the empire's policies and fears in the Western Borderlands and the Caucasus was gradually transferred to the Bessarabian setting. Thus, by the early twentieth century, Russian publicists and officials regarded the Romanian Kingdom as an alternative center of attraction for the Bessarabian populace, as Habsburg Galicia was for Ruthenians/Ukrainians and the Ottoman Empire was for the Muslims of the Caucasus. Of course, one must be careful when comparing these cases since the extent and intensity of such arguments were not as great with regard to Bessarabia. Still, the nationalization of Russian imperial discourse, the ambiguous position of Bessarabia vis-à-vis the Russian core, and the consolidation of the Romanian nation-state helped to reinforce such an image. Although reality caught up with discourse only following the 1905 Revolution, by the time of World War I the region was no longer a secure periphery.

Although the Romanian side of the equation appears much less problematic, Bessarabia was an awkward component of the national body. The region was clearly marginal in the general scheme of national priorities. This was due, on the one hand, to the social and educational situation in the province that delayed the political mobilization of the masses. On the other hand, this marginality was related to the negative perception of the Russian Empire in late nineteenth-century Romania. After the Crimean War, and even more so after the Russian-Ottoman War of 1877–78, the Russian Empire became a threatening and quintessential other only tenuously linked to the civilized world. Whereas Russia's image in the West had normalized before World War I, the Romanian public sphere remained immersed in mid-nineteenth-century Russophobic discourse. This tendency not only served the pragmatic purpose of consolidating Romania's self-image as a bulwark of civilization in the Orient, but also reflected its deep-seated mistrust toward the neighboring empire. Though Bessarabia was part of the problem, its belonging to alien Russian space also made it

more difficult to integrate into the “national hearth.” Even though the rhetoric of national redemption was pervasive at the time, widespread pessimism was also discernible. The characteristic topoi of estrangement, alienation, and ignorance of Bessarabian realities in the Kingdom provide ample illustration of this marginality. The logic of the triangular relationship thus functioned by ascribing Bessarabia to the Russian or Romanian spaces, each of them embodying a peculiar version of modernity. However, the Bessarabian issue was also a part of the two polities’ complicated relationship with the West. It was a testing ground for the vitality of state-building and national forces that confirmed the Russian Empire’s and Romania’s modern credentials.

The most salient feature of the symbolic competition over Bessarabia was the absence of a coherent local voice in the Russian-Romanian controversy. As a result, the local inhabitants of Bessarabia remained a passive object incapable of articulating an alternative vision. Even the revolutionary turmoil of 1905–7 failed to produce any projects pointing to a specific agenda rooted in the province. The only group claiming to speak on behalf of Bessarabians was the tiny community of Bessarabian émigrés in Romania who attempted to inscribe their native land on the map of Romanian national discourse. Though differing widely in their ideological preferences and public impact, they came close to constructing an alternative narrative in which Bessarabia became an indispensable part of the national organism. The success of such figures as Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, Zamfir Arbore, Constantin Stere, and Dimitrie Moruzi in overcoming the narrative silence on Bessarabia and substituting their voices for non-existent local initiatives was limited. This was also due to the uncertainty of identity that plagued the ideologues themselves and did not allow them to integrate their Russian intellectual heritage into the Romanian Kingdom’s political system or public sphere.

The weak development of the local press and Russia’s monopolization of the strategies for symbolic inclusion also prevented any local initiative from reclaiming Bessarabia for the Russian core or building any narrative of regional peculiarity. The closest any Bessarabian public figure came to initiating such a project were the feeble attempts of Pavel Krushevan, who used local realities in order to further his radical Russian nationalist agenda. However, these projects were too insignificant for one to posit the agency of local Bessarabian actors before 1917. The integration of local elites into the Russian imperial system and the insignificance of the intellectual class up to the early twentieth century deprived the province of effective intermediaries who could negotiate the terms of the region’s appropriation by either of the two alternative centers. Thus, the story I have attempted to present here is more about the dilemmas that the Russian and Romanian state-building projects encountered in this contested borderland than about the Bessarabian context as such.

Knowledge, Power, and Intellectuals: Russian and Romanian Entanglements in Eastern Europe

This book is about how political elites and intellectuals imagined various state-building scenarios and their own role in these projects. As alluded to above, the distinction between intellectual and political positions was often rather conventional and was complicated both by the actors themselves and by later scholars who talked about the symbiotic personality of the politician-intellectual in Eastern Europe. This study does not pursue a comparative institutional analysis of intellectuals in the Russian and Romanian contexts along the lines of Christophe Charle's work, but instead focuses on the textual manifestations of the competing national and imperial discourses. Nevertheless, the peculiarity of the Russian and Romanian contexts and thus of Bessarabia is apparent. The Russian Empire produced one of the fundamental models of the militant and politically conscious intellectual class—the intelligentsia—which had an impact as an ideal type far beyond its borders. Although I am not concerned here with the intelligentsia as an anti-establishment, alternative elite committed to overthrowing an imperial regime perceived as flawed and illegitimate, the transfer of this militancy to other areas in Eastern Europe (including Romania) is undeniable, especially starting in the 1860s. In the case of Bessarabia, these East-East transfers account to a large extent for the position of the marginal pro-Bessarabian camp within Romanian national discourse. Whether one takes the peculiar version of populism espoused by Constantin Stere or the militant nihilism that framed Zamfir Arbore-Rally's position on Bessarabia, their views on the Russian Empire, Romania, and the national question were shaped by and responded to the early Russian milieu in which they were socialized. Consequently, the Romanian stance on Bessarabia was at times a response to Russian imagery and discourse, mirroring and undermining them simultaneously. Still, the broader Western point of reference remained much more important for both sides of the debate. It is difficult to trace, for example, the origins of the idealized image of the peasantry to one single source because the social composition and structural constraints of most states in Eastern Europe made the peasants a fundamental, albeit awkward, component of any nation- or empire-building project.

The 1860s raised the stakes dramatically for Russian and Romanian intellectuals involved in identity politics, largely because intellectual discourses started to be manipulated and (ab)used by state structures. The knowledge-power nexus did not work in a straightforward way, and examining individual case studies only reinforces this conclusion. On the Russian side, the older Slavophile-Westernizer controversy was radicalized by the emerging pan-Slavic movement and the works of N. Danilevskii and N. Strakhov, who attempted to popularize their views in hopes of producing a

viable alternative to the traditional dynastic and religious elements of the Russian empire-building project. However, these discourses hardly had any sizable impact on state policies, even at the height of their influence during the Russian-Ottoman War of 1877–78. Conversely, the nationalist pronouncements of the journalist M. N. Katkov caught the ear of the authorities because they tapped into the prevailing mood in the highest echelons of power and seemed to provide an answer to the dilemmas of imperial security in the Western Borderlands.

In Romania, the intellectual field was dominated by the discourse of the nation, which became, in Katherine Verdery's words, "the ideological premise of all argumentation," having achieved the status of "the unquestioned basis of every statement made" in "every sphere of investigation and creation."¹ Anticipating Verdery's later theory of nationalism as the quintessential discourse of modern times, her conclusion that "the nation" became an "ineradicable" component of the "central discourse of politics" neatly captures the pervasive impact of the language of the nation on late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Romanian intellectuals.² They operated within a "powerful ideological field" defined by the debates on the national essence. Although they were divided into liberal and conservative camps that saw the boundaries of the nation and the dynamics of change needed to achieve national goals quite differently, the centrality of the nation was undisputed.³ This led to an enduring tension between the national and social aspects of state-building, which was consistently resolved in favor of the former. Even left-wing ideologues had to introduce a national dimension into their writings in order to partake in broader discussions on national development. Thus, Romania was similar to most of the emerging Balkan states of the period, with the nation appearing at the forefront of ideological debates.

The conflation of intellectual and political activities was more conspicuous in the Romanian case than in the Russian Empire. While in the Romanov Empire intellectuals had a wider range of choices—from active collaboration with the imperial regime to complete rejection epitomized by the radical intelligentsia—in Romania the careers of aspiring intellectuals were intimately intertwined with the official sphere. The bureaucracy provided almost the only employment opportunity for educated young people, not least because of the overproduction in the field of the humanities that small

¹ Katherine Verdery, "The Rise of the Discourse About Romanian Identity: Early 1900s to World War II," in *Românii în istoria universală*, vol. 2, ed. I. Agrigoroaiei, Gh. Buzatu, and V. Cristian (Iași: Editura Universității "Al. I. Cuza," 1987), part I, 89–136, here 120.

² *Ibid.*, 91.

³ *Ibid.*, 125.

academic institutions were unable to absorb. Prior to World War I, most of the leading intellectuals came from elite circles and were politically active, further blurring the line between intellectual and political militancy. This meant that even radical forms of intellectual opposition were limited to the small circles of educated society, which reduced intellectuals' interest in mass politics despite the growing preoccupation with "the people." Paradoxically, in the Russian Empire there was more space for fundamental ideological disagreements among intellectuals because the field itself was more fragmented socially and institutionally. In Romania, there was no gap between the authorities and educated society comparable to the opposition between the intelligentsia and the regime in the Russian Empire. On the one hand, Romanian narratives of the nation were more coherent than Russian narratives of the empire; on the other hand, the link between intellectuals and power appeared much clearer in the Romanian case, whereas the Russian Empire exhibited more diversity and complexity in this regard.

Russian and Romanian intellectuals and elites engaged in symbolic competition over Bessarabia without eliciting any significant responses from the region itself. The Bessarabian intellectual stratum was negligible before the early twentieth century, which explains the province's marginality in both contexts. When compared to other cases of contested borderlands in the Balkans and beyond—for example, the "Macedonian question," the Polish-Ukrainian competition for preeminence in Habsburg Galicia, the Greek irredentist movement, or Serbian claims to Vojvodina—Bessarabian intellectuals' lack of articulation and mobilization is conspicuous. Bessarabia's image as a contested territory was constructed *from outside*, although some prominent Bessarabian-born intellectuals were responsible for placing Bessarabia on the mental map of the Romanian Kingdom. The Bessarabian-born intellectuals who stayed in the Russian Empire were drawn either to right-wing political movements or to radical ideologies. Although numerically insignificant, the militant émigré intellectuals who moved to Romania played a disproportionate role in the articulation and promotion of Russian-Romanian symbolic competition, thus confirming the importance of the transfer of people and ideas across borders. The main predicament of intellectuals such as B. P. Hasdeu and C. Stere was their *double marginality*—both in the Russian milieu from which they came and in their adopted Romanian environment. Before World War I, they were unable to transform their symbolic capital into effective political action, thereby relegating Bessarabia to a secondary status within the Romanian hierarchy of national priorities. The war then transformed the intellectual field by minimizing the distance between the imaginable and the politically feasible.

The Discontinuity of the Two Competing Discourses and the High Points of Symbolic Tension

An implicit question built into my narrative addresses the dynamics of the emergence and evolution of the alternative visions outlined in this volume. Far from a continuous competition between two coherent sets of representations, the controversy over Bessarabia's belonging surfaced periodically during moments of international crisis or mutual symbolic subversion when the legitimacy of Russian control over the Bessarabian borderland was questioned. I have identified three crucial instances that marked and structured the discursive clash between Russia and Romania. The first direct confrontation occurred during the 1877–78 Russian-Ottoman War when the Russian claim to the three districts of Southern Bessarabia led to the articulation of opposing criteria for the territory's symbolic appropriation. The Russian-Romanian diplomatic controversy was based on a combination of *realpolitik*, emphasizing the interests of the Great Powers on the Lower Danube, and the language of national victimization that constructed an image of a unitary national body. These discursive strategies alternated and varied according to the intended audience. For the first time in its history, Bessarabia became a territory inscribed on the map of the Romanian national imagination. This controversy also produced heated polemics on Romania's nation-building priorities. Bessarabia's importance for the nation was contrasted to Dobrogea's, which was transformed from an oriental and undesirable space into the "California of the Romanians."

The second moment of symbolic tension was linked to the celebration of the one-hundredth anniversary of the region's annexation by the Russian Empire in 1912. This event marked the zenith of the Russian Empire's attempts to construct a coherent image of the province and to forge a representation of Bessarabia as an organic part of the empire. Although political reality in Bessarabia was unaffected by the official celebration ceremonies staged by imperial authorities, 1912 marked the triumph of the language of nationalism in both Russia and Romania. Bessarabia was claimed by the competing Russian and Romanian projects in unmistakably modern terms, anticipating the political and symbolic conflicts that erupted several decades later. Aside from being rooted in the search for the legitimacy of the autocratic state in the dynamic early twentieth-century world, the contested and incoherent nature of Russian discourses concerning Bessarabia derived from the complex social structure of the empire that defied any attempt at official categorization and control. In the Bessarabian case, one could tentatively speak about the separate, albeit connected, positions of the nobility, the clergy, the central bureaucracy, and the monarchy (understood as the imperial family and court circles). However, the problem with such a scheme is the overlapping and fluid nature of Russia's social

groups in this period. The main rhetorical tropes used to convey the province's belonging to Russia could be classified into four main groups: 1) the theme of progress and the civilizing mission of the empire in the borderlands (entailing a broader opposition between civilization and barbarity); 2) the theme of empire as family, blending traditional paternalistic themes with the recent influence of a nationalizing vocabulary; 3) the related topic of a direct relationship between the Russian and Moldavian peoples, with clear populist overtones; and 4) the extensive use of the Russian blood metaphor in order to strengthen Russia's material claim to the province.

The third defining moment in the Russian-Romanian symbolic conflict over Bessarabia coincided with World War I. The role of the 1914–16 period in transforming the collective image of the Bessarabian population along ethnic lines is crucial. The first two years of the war represented an inflection point for the reassessment of the multiethnic character of Bessarabia. The radical population politics implemented during the war by Russian authorities collectively targeted entire ethnic groups. This strategy contributed to the inversion of traditional ethnic hierarchies and to the nationalization of the combatant armies. Coupled with societal collapse and unprecedented political mobilization, the impact of the war led to the transformation of the borderlands into areas of bitter social and ethnic conflict. These conflicts were often perceived as anti-imperial and revolutionary struggles. Bessarabia was engulfed by the revolutionary turmoil in 1917–18, ultimately resulting in its unification with Romania. The first two years of the war also witnessed growing interest in the “Bessarabian question” in Romania. During the period of Romanian neutrality, the Bessarabian theme was exploited by pro-German political groups, who attempted to present Bessarabia as an alternative national priority in contrast to Transylvania. Although the pro-German faction lost this symbolic and political battle, the “Bessarabian question” featured prominently in postwar settlement plans. Indeed, Bessarabia's growing visibility within Romanian national debates prepared the ground for this region's incorporation into Romania in 1918.

Religion in the Mirror of Russian-Romanian Symbolic Competition: An Entangled History

The religious dimension was fundamental for the contrasting images of Bessarabia produced by the Russian Empire and Romania. First, Orthodoxy continued to function as a powerful discursive strategy for the Russian empire-building project in the borderlands. The loyalty of borderland communities was frequently measured in terms of their closeness to the Russian standard, and Orthodoxy was one of the main criteria of belonging

to the empire's core. Consequently, the population of Bessarabia was perceived as one of the most loyal groups of imperial subjects. Second, as was clear on the occasion of the 1912 anniversary, the Church as an institution was instrumental in elaborating a coherent narrative of imperial belonging. The Church hierarchy was a willing and occasionally enthusiastic participant in imperial ceremonies and served as a link between the government and the faithful masses. Third, a new phase of local Church activism in Bessarabia began in the early twentieth century. Many Bessarabian priests became involved in renewal and dissident movements, and the fledgling national movement included a number of clergy members or priests' sons among its prominent activists. Thus, the encounter between Orthodoxy and local national-cultural grievances produced unexpected results and confounded the central authorities on more than one occasion. Fourth, the Bessarabian Church became a less reliable partner for the center after 1909 when its authority was undermined by the millenarian "Inochentist" movement, which preached to the peasant masses in the local vernacular. Taken together, these developments transformed the Church into a major player in the arena of mass politics in the early twentieth century.

A shared Orthodox faith was a potent factor in the elaboration of enduring stereotypes of Romanian society within Russian imperial discourse (and vice-versa), and not only in the symbolic sphere. Religious commonality provided one of the few remaining avenues for maintaining a lasting connection between Russian and Romanian elites, especially after the crisis of 1878. Some members of the Romanian Orthodox clergy, especially a number of prelates with pro-Russian leanings, were accused of creating secret pro-Russian networks and even cultivating obscure links with marginal pro-Russian political groups that emerged after the unification of Moldavia and Wallachia in 1859—groups associated mostly with the conservative Moldavian boyars' discontent with the union of the two principalities. In the 1860s, Russian political and ecclesiastical elites produced additional polemical representations of Romania that further complicated the picture. The Romanian nation-building project was perceived as an imitative, superficial, and Western-inspired undertaking that alienated Romanian intellectuals and ruling elites from the roots of national life. A fundamental opposition between the peasantry and the Westernized upper classes became a persistent cliché of Russian discourse on Romania. Moreover, the language and conceptual categories that emerged during the 1860s in the Russian Empire's Western Borderlands in connection with the "Polish question" and the role of the Catholic clergy were reproduced in the Romanian case. The obsession with the threat of "Latinism" and the pervasive danger of Catholic propaganda that dominated Russian images of the Romanian Church and society allowed Russian observers to project the ideal vision of the self through the inverted mirror of the other. This transfer of

concepts and language from Russia's Western Borderlands to the Romanian context points to the link between anti-Catholic rhetoric, Slavophile/pan-Slavic tendencies, the ethnicization of religion, and the deep uncertainty regarding the nation- and empire-building potential of Orthodoxy that imperial elites projected outwards.

Despite the subtle nuances in many Russian images of Romania during this period, the phobias connected to Catholic propaganda, Romanian elites' "inclination toward Latinism," and the subsequent weakening of Orthodoxy in Romania constantly re-emerged during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century. The entanglement of geopolitics with the domestic context of the Russian Empire, which transformed Catholicism into the main target of official criticism and suspicion, had a significant impact on Russian visions of Romania. Like the Western Borderlands, Romania was seen as a victim of insidious and pernicious Catholic propaganda, which was purportedly aided and abetted by a Catholic monarch and Westernizing elites. These rhetorical strategies were reproduced and amplified by Russophile circles within Romania, creating a curious magnifying and self-fulfilling effect. Although these images became somewhat less prominent in the immediate prewar years, they never disappeared entirely, even when Russian-Romanian relations began to improve. They were also directly related to the symbolic competition over Bessarabia, allowing Russian observers and some Bessarabian intellectuals to emphasize the growing cultural distance between Romania and the Bessarabian population. This chasm between the Westernizing Romanian state and the staunchly Orthodox and loyal Bessarabian Romanians was an additional argument, in their view, for rejecting any Romanian claims to Bessarabia as part of the national body.

Rural Immobility, Ethnic Continuity, and National Characterology: Bessarabia as a Part of the Romanian National Organism

As stated above, the Romanian national narrative on Bessarabia was more coherent than its imperial Russian counterpart. Though contested between the liberal-leftist, statist, and conservative camps of the Romanian political establishment, the image of Bessarabia constructed in the Romanian Kingdom displayed a number of underlying features that adopted similar techniques of symbolic appropriation. The consensus among Romanian writers focusing on Bessarabia before and during World War I rested upon the assumption of the nation's organic character in contrast to the artificial and transient essence of neighboring empires. Thus, a contradictory and uneven image of imperial space—as inherently torn between centrifugal and centripetal tendencies and simultaneously displaying military strength and

internal structural weakness—prevailed. Though conceived as opposites, the national unitary organism and the imperial conglomerate were thus complementary in many ways. National discourse was also rather insecure with regard to the onset of modernity. While presenting the nation-state as its embodiment and vehicle, Romanian intellectuals writing on Bessarabia rediscovered the recurrent themes of national endurance and unchanging tradition that were directly responsible for the preservation of the ethnic vitality of Romanians in the East.

However, to conclude that such ideas could be instrumentalized exclusively for nation-building purposes would be inaccurate. The musings of Romanian writers on the timelessness of the Bessarabian village or the superior traits of the locals' national character were not so different from their Russian peers' remarks on the pure nature of the Bessarabian noble savage. Bessarabia constituted an object of internal Orientalism in Romanian and Russian discourses of collective identity. What differed significantly were the frames for the two states' political legitimacy and the implications for Bessarabia's symbolic geography. The nationalizing tendency prevalent in late nineteenth-century Russian ethnography echoed the ideas of Romanian observers on the essentially immobile and patriarchal nature of the local peasantry, even if Russian ethnographers endowed this assertion with a very different political and cultural meaning. This shows the extent to which the results of any project of political inclusion (including nation-building) are contingent upon the relative success of competing actors. In the Romanian case, the presumed ethnic vitality of the Bessarabians was clearly in the eye of the beholder. However, a more detailed study of the emerging trend of national pedagogy and the emphasis on national character (that reached its peak in interwar Romania) could shed new light on the relative importance of Bessarabia for Romanian nation-building. It could also point to the shared context in which Russian and Romanian visions of the self and the other emerged in the Bessarabian borderland.

To conclude, the peculiarity of the Bessarabian case during the second half of the nineteenth century was the product of its contested character. While far from unusual given the many contested borderlands across the region from Macedonia to Galicia, it was unique within the Russian Empire. This case study provides a glimpse into some of the major dilemmas that confronted imperial and national states in early twentieth-century Eurasia, including the perception of foreign irredentism as a potential threat, the entanglements of domestic and foreign policy, the possibility of undermining the legitimacy of an opponent, and, ultimately, the nature of the competing state-building projects and their relationship to modernity. In fact,

one hundred years later, these dilemmas continue to affect world politics, albeit in a different manner. Whether post-imperial or (post-)national, the major players on the world stage continue to compete for symbols, space, and identity. The borderlands remain contested spaces of ongoing power struggles. It is my sincere hope that this small-scale study of Bessarabia has managed to illuminate the debates that persist into the early twenty-first century as well.

Instead of an Epilogue: Autonomy, Federalism, or National Unification (1917–18)?

The collapse of the Romanov dynasty in March 1917 and the new opportunities created by the opening of political space throughout the former empire had an immediate effect on Bessarabia. The major cleavage that emerged at this time concerned the national and social aspects of the revolutionary transformations. As in other borderlands of the Russian Empire (and with much greater intensity than was the case in 1905), the clash between nationalizing and socializing agendas determined the contours of political debates from March 1917 until March 1918. In more concrete terms, this interval witnessed the first efforts aimed at mass political mobilization. The actors competing for the allegiance of the mostly peasant constituencies could be conventionally divided into the following categories. The first is the revolutionary movement represented by local Bolshevik and Socialist Revolutionary organizations that emphasized the agrarian question and called for the immediate redistribution of property in the province. The combination of long-standing peasant grievances and the concerted propaganda efforts of socializing agents resulted in the massive eruption of peasant violence during 1917, culminating in a significant change in the patterns of land ownership that later had an important impact on agrarian reform in Bessarabia.

The second major category consisted of national activists grouped around the periodical *Cuvânt Moldovenesc* and later the Moldavian National Party (MNP), founded in April 1917. However, this loosely defined national movement was far from unified in its vision for the province's future. If the more nationally conscious wing led by Pan Halippa and Ion Pelivan insisted from the outset on the preeminence of the national-cultural aspect and partial political emancipation, the "Petrograd group," which was based in the Russian capital and was directly involved in the revolutionary events there, was much more reluctant to sever its ties to the central government and thus upheld the primacy of social reforms. Its main representatives who returned to Bessarabia in the summer of 1917 were P. Erhan and I. Inculeț. The third category consisted of right-wing and monarchist movements that were marginalized during the revolutionary period

and failed to mobilize their adherents effectively, which showed to what extent the context of war had changed the locus of social power, and also how dependent these organizations were on state support. In what follows, I will briefly focus on the political imagination of the local actors in the revolutionary context and discuss their attitude toward Bessarabia's future. The local Bessarabian voices that finally surfaced during the intense debates about the province's future in the post-imperial era spoke primarily about autonomy. However, this topos could be framed in starkly different terms depending on the context, the target audience, and the intended outcome. Thus, in early April 1917, the program of the Moldavian National Party (the most outspoken organization to raise national grievances) demanded the "broadest autonomy" for Bessarabia in the administrative, judicial, ecclesiastical, educational, and economic sectors. The grounds given for the region's new status stemmed not only from the precedent of the early nineteenth-century autonomist experiment, but also from the principle of "national self-determination."¹ One Moldovan historian's claim that the platform of the Moldavian National Party evolved from a "confederative scenario" toward a much more limited vision of "national-regional autonomy" seems doubtful.² In fact, the leaders of this organization oscillated between competing models of center-periphery relations throughout 1917. If anything, the radicalization of the initially moderate autonomist program resulted from the uncontrollable dynamics of Russian politics. As long as the hope for the restoration and consolidation of a stable central government persisted, local Bessarabian leaders were securely anchored in the imagined space of the Russian state.

This did not mean that the impact of federalist thought and the contamination caused by models of political restructuring devised in the Habsburg Monarchy was negligible. In fact, the federalist model was the dominant one among Moldavian politicians at the time. The criteria for the future organization of the federal arrangement were, however, hotly debated. A compromise was necessary to reconcile the ethno-national principles promoted by the Moldavian National Party and the territorial criteria preferred by representatives of other ethnic groups who feared the potential transformation of multiethnic Bessarabia into a Moldavian nation-state. Thus, during the discussions preceding the convocation of the local assembly (*Sfatul Țării*)—formed through the co-optation of representatives of local institutions, professional corporations, and estates—one of the former employees of the Russian imperial administration asserted the following: "I

¹ Ion Calafeteanu and Viorica Moisuc, eds., *Unirea Basarabiei și Bucovinei cu România, 1917–1918* [Bessarabia's and Bukovina's unification with Romania, 1917–1918] (Chișinău: Hyperion, 1995), 26.

² Negru, *Țarismul și mișcarea națională a românilor din Basarabia*, 83.

know that you [Moldavian 'separatists'] desire to create a nation-state in Bessarabia. This is the dream of the whole nineteenth century, but it failed in Great Russia, and you want to institute a nation-state here, in Bessarabia, which is so similar to Russia from the ethnographic point of view."³ Here the clash between the vision of unitary Russian statehood and the restructuring of the former empire along ethno-national lines is evident. Still, such an opposition would be quite misleading. Local nationalism was anything but assertive and did not fundamentally challenge Bessarabia's symbolic belonging to Russia. The nationalization of Bessarabian intellectuals was fraught with ambiguity until the very eve of the decisive events of 1918 leading to the region's integration into the Romanian Kingdom. One of the most eloquent illustrations of this ambiguity was the official declaration of the autonomous Moldavian Democratic Republic by the *Sfatul Țării* on December 2, 1917. This foundational document of Bessarabian autonomy ended by solemnly invoking "the common mother of us all, the Great Russian Democratic Republic," already an imaginary project by the time the declaration was issued.⁴ Ironically, just three and a half months after the event, the same assembly solemnly proclaimed the "perpetual union" of Bessarabia with its "mother-country," Romania. What made it possible to turn the marginal project of pan-Romanian unification into a viable option by the spring of 1918?

Three main factors accounted for this momentous shift in the local political landscape. First was the prominent role played by Moldavian military units in the nationalization of local politics. Partly as a result of the Provisional Government's policy of introducing national units in the Russian army and partly as a consequence of the self-organization of soldiers' committees under the anarchic conditions across the Romanian Front, the political awareness of Bessarabian-born soldiers and officers sharply increased in 1917. The Russian imperial army provided a hitherto absent environment for mass politicization. Aside from the attraction to revolutionary propaganda, the first signs of a national agenda emerging among the troops were apparent as early as the spring of 1917. A lively campaign among Bessarabian soldiers stationed in Kiev and Odessa was under way, intensified by contact with Romanian prisoners from Austro-Hungarian units. The impact of the politicization of the military was soon felt in Bessarabia proper. Though the first articulated political programs were formulated at earlier assemblies of the cooperative movement, of Bessarabian peasants and local teachers during April and May 1917, the decisive steps to legitimize local autonomy and convene the *Sfatul Țării* were taken during the

³ Ibid., 96.

⁴ Calafeteanu and Moisuc, *Unirea Basarabiei și Bucovinei cu România, 1917–1918*, 120.

Moldavian Military Congress held in Kishinev on October 20–27, 1917. On this occasion, the profound rifts between the nationalizing and socializing priorities of the different groups within the military were thrust into the open. The final resolution of the congress, which was in fact a compromise between the rival factions, declared Bessarabia's allegiance to the Russian Federative Democratic Republic of which Bessarabia would be a constituent part. The concrete terms of Bessarabia's political and territorial autonomy were deferred until the convocation of the Russian Constituent Assembly. Thus, the framework for political legitimacy was still rooted in the idea of a renewed and democratic Russia.

Two additional factors made this option impossible. The first was the declaration of autonomy and then the independence of the Ukrainian state. Relations between the Bessarabian leaders and the Ukrainian Rada were rather tense due to the territorial claims that Kiev made first on the Hotin and Akkerman districts (where Ruthenians were a sizable part of the population) and then on all of Bessarabia. The universal rejection of these demands by all political parties in Bessarabia thus clearly prompted the official declaration of autonomy in December 1917. Moreover, the existence of a Ukrainian political entity meant the severing of all direct links to the government in Petrograd, which prompted even its adherents in Bessarabia to be more attuned to local realities.

The second and decisive factor was linked to the disappearance of any legitimate government in the eyes of Bessarabian elites after the Bolshevik seizure of power. Besides the local Bolsheviks, no part of Bessarabia's politically active population recognized the new government. Although the summoning of Romanian troops to Bessarabia in January 1918 was initially a matter of military expediency to restore public order, unification with Romania was increasingly favored by propertied classes and landowners (who sent a petition to the Romanian King Ferdinand in January 1918) and by members of the local assembly, most of whom were affiliated with the political Left. Even though the Romanian state was obviously underdeveloped, it offered the best alternative to a disintegrating Russian social and political system. Furthermore, the discourse of Romanian cultural and political unity was not absent in 1917 and early 1918. It was promoted by Bessarabian national activists and by other public figures, most notably the Transylvanian-born writer and journalist Onisifor Ghibu, whose memoirs and polemical writings provide one of the fullest and most compelling accounts of Bessarabia's situation during this period. This discourse, however, remained marginal until the convolutions of international politics prompted Bessarabian elites to negotiate a compromise with the Romanian government in March 1918.

The Act of Union voted into law on March 27, 1918, represented just such a compromise. The eleven conditions stipulated in the document—

which guaranteed extensive self-government, the swift application of radical agrarian reform, and concrete privileges in the financial, administrative, and military sectors—seem to suggest that Bessarabian politicians envisaged a federalist arrangement between the province and the center. Although the chances of achieving this scenario were minimal given the structure of the Romanian political system and the limited space for Bessarabian leaders to maneuver, this expectation gives one insight into their political imagination. Far from the preferred course in local politics of the period, national unification was one of many options available to them and only became the preferred option in early 1918. The incongruence between the spheres of discourse and political action so characteristic for the Bessarabian case was especially visible during 1917–18. The Bessarabian elites' expectations were the result of immediate social concerns sparked by revolutionary upheaval and were not tied to a coherent Romanian national project. Indeed, when they were finally able to display their subjecthood, Bessarabian Romanians defied the logic of Russian and Romanian discourses that claimed their loyalty. At the end of 1918 this logic reasserted itself again. In its last act, the *Sfatul Țării* voted to abolish the conditions for the union on November 27, 1918. Several days later, Greater Romania, a most improbable creation of the complex web of international politics after World War I, became a reality. Bessarabia was thus wholly incorporated into the Romanian nation-building project. The Russian-Romanian controversy entered a new phase that in many ways has not yet ended even in the early twenty-first century. This book has attempted to show that its nineteenth- and early twentieth-century antecedents should not be ignored.

Bessarabia is an example of the entanglements, ambiguities, and interconnections between discourses and practices of nation and empire that shaped each other and also the fate of the populations inhabiting the borderlands between polities that defined themselves on the basis of opposing legitimizing principles. At certain moments, however, the inhabitants of the borderlands developed their own agency and reacted to central policies in ways unforeseen by dominant imperial and national elites. Most importantly, imperial and national legacies are present and constantly renegotiated in societies that have been constructed and imagined in reference to their previous history as well as to their prospects for the future. Whether today's inhabitants of the land once known as Bessarabia can construct a durable collective identity, or whether they will be continuously haunted by the specter of history and empire remains an open question.

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AS FIXED BY THE
TREATIES OF 30TH MARCH 1856, 6TH JANY 1857, & 19TH JUNE 1857.

*Annex N^o 1 to the Protocol of Paris
of 6th January 1857.*

Scale of British Statute Miles.

MAP
 SHEWING THE
BOUNDARY BETWEEN
RUSSIA & TURKEY
 ON THE
BESSARABIAN FRONTIER
 AS FIXED BY THE
 TREATIES OF 30TH MARCH 1856, 6TH JAN^Y 1857, & 19TH JUNE 1857.

Reduced from the Map laid before Parliament in 1857.
Annex N^o 1 to the Protocol of Paris of 6th January 1857.

Scale of British Statute Miles.
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Cowley.
 Hubner.
 A. Walewski.
 C. H. Hatzfeldt.
 Brunnow.
 De Villamarina.
 Mehemed Djemil.

Harrison & Sons, Lith. S' Martins Lane, W C

Source: Wikimedia Commons



Figure 2. The Joint Russian-Romanian Commission for the Transfer of Authority over the Three Southern Bessarabian Districts (Cahul, Bolgrad,

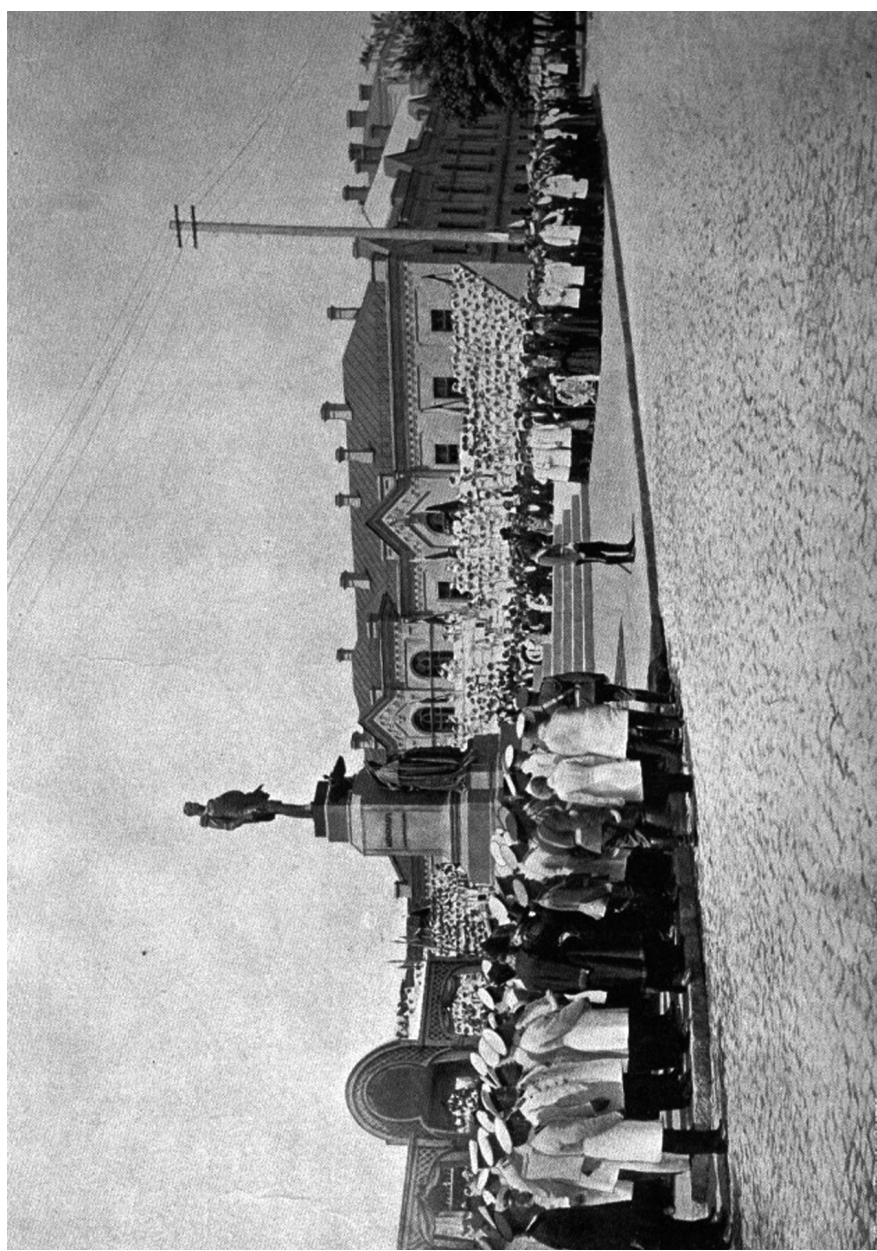


Figure 3. The official inauguration of the monument to Emperor Alexander I

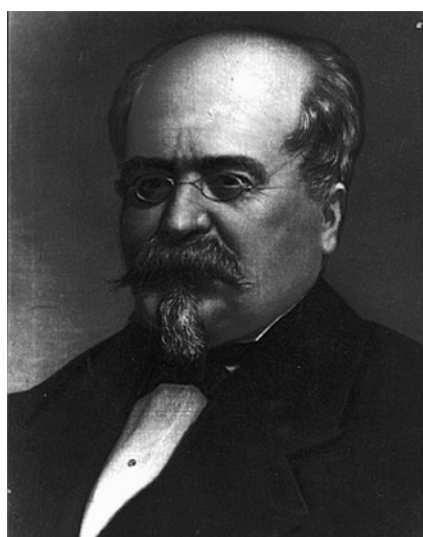


Figure 4. Mihail Kogălniceanu (1817–1891), Romanian Foreign Minister (1876–1878). Source: Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 5. Nicolae Iorga (1871–1940). Source: Wikimedia Commons.

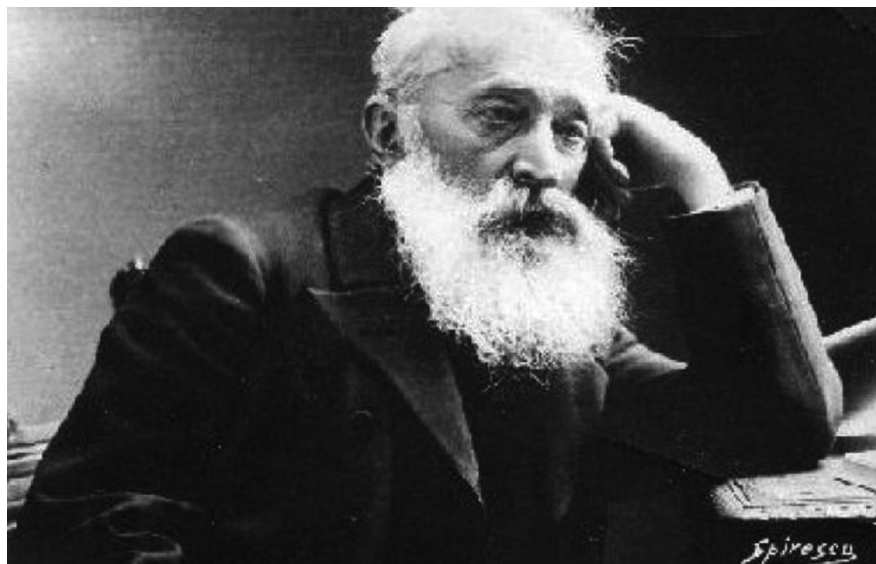


Figure 6. Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu (1838–1907).



Figure 7. Dimitrie C. Moruzi (1850–1914). Source: Wikimedia Commons





Figure 9. The editorial board of the newspaper *Basarabia*. Kishinev, 1906.

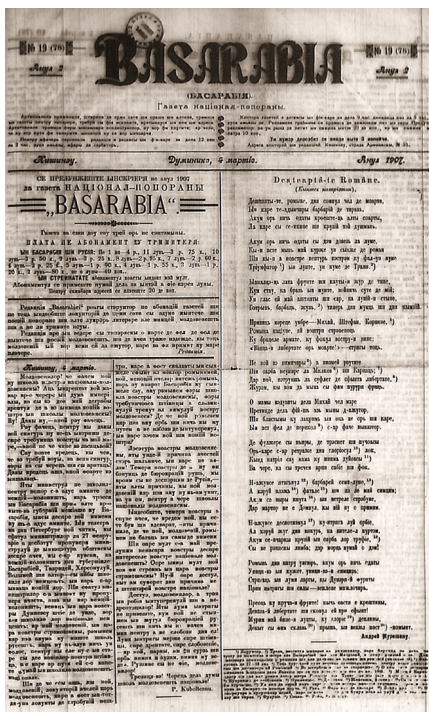


Figure 10. The front page of the last issue of *Basarabia* (Nr. 78, March 9, 1907). Source: “Mihail Kogălniceanu” Museum of Romanian Literature,



Figure 11. The Russian imperial family and the Romanian royal family during their meeting in Constanța (June 1914).

ALEXIS NOUR

MAIESTE ATATULUI-MAJOR JOZSEF ENTE
NATI ALI AL BAHARABESII LOCATE IN POSA
SI GERMANIA. DATELE ANUALE ALI
ADMINISTRATIV AL BAHARABESII DIN
1919. MATERIALUL IN CHESTIA NATI
NATITUTII DIN BAHARABESII COLES
DE TERMOATE BAHARABESII (CONSU
LARE JUDETELE) INTRE ANI 1906-1908
PENTRU LABORAREA PROIECTULUI DE IN
TRODUCERE INSTRUCTIUNII GENERALE SI
OBLIGATORIE IN BAHARABESII. CONSTA
TARILE LOCALE CE AM FIOT PERSONAL
DUPATE JUDEI ASUPRA BAHARABESII.
ANEXE: PROIECTUL IN LIMBA RUMA

Tote documente localizate sunt repro-

NOTĂ. Harta etnografică a Transnistrianei (humită în rusește „Zadnestroviie”) indică a teritoriilor româno-rutene din Herson și Podolia, cuprinse între flăstru. Bun și Dobruja este în lucru și se află în curând.

(IN COPERȚA, ROTUNDA, ȘI CĂPȘA, ÎNFRUNTĂ, 1976)

ГИБС-8 2000 000

TREI MILIONE LOCUTORI

IN TOTA BASARABIA

10000	10000
20000	20000
30000	30000
40000	40000
50000	50000
60000	60000
70000	70000
80000	80000
90000	90000
100000	100000

60,000	Scissors
65,000	Teens

72,000 **Rendite nach**
10% KITA

114

form

230,000. June.

10

2000
2001
2002

graphic

54

[illegible]

Benjamin de Beau-Seigneur ou Comte de Beau-Seigneur

1999年1月1日 - 2000年12月31日

Figure 12. Ethnographic map of Bessarabia by Alexis Nour, 1917.

A Contested Borderland is a thoughtful and well-crafted study of how one borderland region—Bessarabia—was the object of efforts to appropriate it by, on the one hand, a Russian imperial project, and, on the other, by a Romanian national project. A major contribution of this work is to demonstrate not only the symbolic contestation over this region, but to illuminate the differences between how an empire sought to incorporate this territory and how a nation-state sought to do the same. Through a broad reading of a wide range of archival documents, contemporary press, memoirs, and other publications, Cusco devotes special attention to how both the Russian imperial and Romanian national projects engaged in a *symbolic* competition to appropriate the region. The work covers an impressive chronological sweep, from the 1860s to 1918. Employing broader analytic concepts, such as Orientalism and civil society, this work will be of interest to scholars of both the Russian empire and southeastern Europe, as well as students of borderland studies and nineteenth-century Europe more generally.

Peter Holquist, *Associate Professor, University of Pennsylvania*

The “Bessarabian Question” was one of the thorniest but least-understood problems of nineteenth- and twentieth-century diplomacy in Eastern Europe. In this erudite, deeply researched, and sensitive account, Andrei Cusco shows how both Romanian and Russian imperial interests intersected in this small but much-disputed borderland. In its level of detail and eloquence of style, Cusco’s book is unmatched as a study in the limits of diplomacy, the origins of nation-building, and the travails of empire-maintenance.

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